



The Triune God

JOEL R. BEEKE
D. A. CARSON
BRYAN CHAPPELL
KEVIN DEYOUNG
IAIN M. DUGUID
MICHAEL S. HORTON
HYWEL JONES
RICHARD D. PHILLIPS
PHILIP GRAHAM RYKEN
R. C. SPROUL

EDITED BY RONALD L. KOHL

The Triune God

The Triune God

EDITED BY
RONALD L. KOHL


P U B L I S H I N G
P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

© 2014 by Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—except for brief quotations for the purpose of review or comment, without the prior permission of the publisher, P&R Publishing Company, P.O. Box 817, Phillipsburg, New Jersey 08865-0817.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from *ESV Bible*® (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations in chapters 6, 10, and 11 are from the Holy Bible, Today's New International Version™ TNIV® Copyright © 2001, 2005 by International Bible Society®. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations in chapters 7 and 9 are from the King James Version.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

ISBN: 978-1-59638-981-6 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-59638-982-3 (ePub)

ISBN: 978-1-59638-983-0 (Mobi)

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014930953

To the flock at Grace Bible Fellowship Church,
which has embraced its pastor, warts and all.

To Kendra,
who daily shows me in a practical way what God's grace looks like
by loving me far better than I deserve.

“To the King of ages,
immortal, invisible, the only God,
be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Contents

Editor's Preface ix

PART 1: GOD THE FATHER

1. The Greatness of God 3
BRYAN CHAPELL
2. The Holiness of God 21
RICHARD D. PHILLIPS
3. The Truth of God 45
KEVIN DEYOUNG
4. The Wrath of God 67
RICHARD D. PHILLIPS
5. The Love of God 89
BRYAN CHAPELL

PART 2: GOD THE SON

6. The Glory of the Son 109
D. A. CARSON
7. The Incarnate Word 135
JOEL R. BEEKE

CONTENTS

8. The Life and Ministry of Jesus 161
IAIN M. DUGUID
9. The Cross of Christ 181
JOEL R. BEEKE
10. Our Risen Savior 211
D. A. CARSON

PART 3: GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

11. Streams of Living Water 239
D. A. CARSON
12. The Age of the Spirit 259
MICHAEL S. HORTON
13. Born of the Spirit 279
PHILIP GRAHAM RYKEN
14. Life in the Spirit 305
HYWEL JONES
15. Holy Spirit, Counselor 321
R. C. SPROUL

Editor's Preface

ONE OF MY SEMINARY professors said it succinctly: “Deny the Trinity and you will lose your soul. Try to explain the Trinity and you can lose your mind.”

This is not a book that attempts to define or explain the Trinity, but it is a book that enriches the Christian's love for our triune God.

To start with, it assumes what the Bible assumes: that our God is One, yet is three distinct persons. “The heart of Christian faith in God,” writes J. I. Packer, “is the revealed mystery of the Trinity. *Trinitas* is a Latin word meaning threeness. Christianity rests on the doctrine of the *trinitas*, the threeness, the tripersonality, of God.”¹

While the term *trinity* does not appear in Scripture but is credited to Tertullian, it is impossible to read Scripture without seeing both the presence and the coequality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At Jesus' baptism, the Father's voice boomed from heaven while the Spirit descended upon the Son. As Jesus spoke in what we know as his Great Commission, he commanded his disciples to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19).

One God. Three persons. Our triune God.

1. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 65.

“If there be one God subsisting in three persons,” the great Puritan Thomas Watson noted, “then let us give equal reverence to all the persons in the Trinity. There is not more or less in the Trinity; the Father is not more God than the Son and Holy Ghost.”²

The essays that comprise this book—five for each member of the Trinity—were originally sermons delivered at conferences sponsored by the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. The chapters on God the Father come from the 2011 Quakertown Regional Conference on Reformed Theology (QrCRT), whose theme was simply “Our Great God.” In 2010 QrCRT’s theme of “Our Glorious Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ” produced this book’s essays on God the Son. The chapters on the Holy Spirit draw from a deeper well, however: the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology (PCRT), the “mother lode” of Reformed theology conferences, started in 1974 by the late Dr. James Montgomery Boice. In 2002 PCRT’s theme of “The Promised Holy Spirit” provided rich material for this collection.

The process of editing, while at times demanding, allowed me the great privilege of walking through the fertile minds of great practical theologians as they interacted with inspired, infallible, inerrant texts. For that I am both thankful and grateful. As I read through their sermons, many of which I had heard before, my heart and mind were blessed and I was reminded of the depth and width and breadth of the Bible’s teaching on “God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity.”³

I am thankful to the men who have contributed their wisdom and labors to this endeavor by addressing such an inexhaustible subject. To Joel Beeke, D. A. Carson, Bryan Chapell, Kevin

2. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d.), 108, available online at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/watson/divinity.pdf>.

3. Reginald Heber, “Holy, Holy, Holy” (1826).

DeYoung, Iain Duguid, and Richard Phillips, thank you for your willingness to come to Quakertown, taking time out of your busy schedules to provide your insights and edify the saints.

To those who spoke in 2002 at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia—D. A. Carson, Michael Horton, Hywel Jones, Philip Ryken, and R. C. Sproul—the conference Dr. Boice started so many years ago remains the inspiration for the many that have followed it. This editor has benefitted greatly from a long line of godly men who have graced the pulpit at Tenth; to glorify God while equipping believers through the careful teaching of the Word of God remains the highest calling of the preacher.

This book begins with a look at the character of the Father; while there is no possibility of exhausting God's attributes, five are singled out for closer examination. Bryan Chapell capably draws our attention to the greatness and love of God. Kevin DeYoung, with characteristic humor and sharpness, hones in on the subject of truth in relation to God. Richard Phillips uses careful exegesis of 2 Samuel 6 and Hebrews 10 to deal with the holiness and the wrath of God respectively.

Turning to the second person of the Trinity, D. A. Carson brings us to John 5 so that we may see the glory of the Son. From there the section on Christ flows in chronological fashion. Joel Beeke takes us to John 1 for the purpose of showing us the importance of the Word who "became flesh and dwelt among us" (v. 14). Iain Duguid brings his rich knowledge of the Old Testament to his chapter on the life and ministry of Jesus. From there Joel Beeke brings us to the cross, patiently but urgently showing us what Jesus endured and what he accomplished in suffering and dying as a ransom for sinners. And finally D. A. Carson shows us the wonder of Christ's resurrection through Thomas's eyes.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

The chapters on the Holy Spirit unfold in yet a different way, with an emphasis on the Spirit's work and ministry. D. A. Carson introduces the section with what Jesus said in John 7 about the Spirit's coming, which produces "streams of living water." Michael Horton uses imagery and analogy as anchoring points in his essay on the "Age of the Spirit." Hywel Jones draws from Paul's great text, Romans 8, to describe what life in the Spirit looks like, while Philip Ryken uses a rich description of Jesus' discourse with Nicodemus in John 3 to detail what it means to be "born of the Spirit." The ministry of the Holy Spirit as Counselor is left in the very capable hands of R. C. Sproul.

As is always the case in a project of this size, there are many people whose encouragement, advice, and insights have been invaluable.

To those who have played major roles in the inception and growth of QrCRT: what started as a dream has, I think, exceeded any of our expectations. Thanks to the many who volunteer each year and especially to those who serve on the planning committee: Paul Bevan-Xenelis, Adam Dieffenbach, Torry Hinkle, Jesse Light, Doreen McIlwraith, Michael Roberts, Eric and Diane Wolfinger. Your willingness, sacrifice, and joy in giving of your time are an encouragement as you serve unto the Lord and not unto men.

To the kind folks at the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals: Bob Brady, Karen Ciavoletta, Jeffrey Waddington. Thanks for your encouragement—and your patience too! I hope I haven't driven you crazy by setting a new Guinness record for email frequency.

To Ian Thompson, Amanda Martin, and Aaron Gottier at P&R Publishing, thank you for entrusting me with this project and for believing it would be accomplished, even when I wasn't quite so sure.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

Thanks to those who have reached out in special ways over these past few years. To Linda Boice, whose kind notes and precious words make me feel that her husband would be pleased with what we're doing in Quakertown. To Carl Trueman, Rick Phillips, and Philip Ryken, who have offered advice and time when they've probably had far more important things to do, showing true grace to a brother in Christ. To Michael Roberts, whose zeal for research—a real bulldog for footnote citations—have helped to prevent impending deadlines from adding more gray hairs to the editor's scalp.

To the congregation, pastors, elders, deacons, and staff of Grace Bible Fellowship Church in Quakertown, thank you for your love, your friendship, your hunger for God and for his Word, and your support and care for your pastor, allowing him to take on a project like this one. I thank my God in every remembrance of you.

To the precious gift who is my wife Kendra, please know that I love you, that you are my much-needed helpmate, and that, as I always say—and rightly so, as much as you may deny it—I “married up.”

Most importantly, I am forever grateful to God for rescuing this sinner from the depths of his depravity and transferring him from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of his beloved Son.

May this work bring glory to the triune God, who alone is worthy to receive glory and honor and power.

Ronald L. Kohl
November 2013

P A R T 1

God the Father

1

The Greatness of God

BRYAN CHAPPELL

YOU MAY CONSIDER the character of God, the attributes of God, the provision of God—all the things that are great in his doing and being—but the greatness of God is such a broad topic that, if there’s any demerit in writing on it, it would be the difficulty of knowing where to even enter the subject.

God is great in more ways than any human can count, but one way he is great is in contradistinction to what we are.

A passage that makes that very plain is Romans 4. It is an explication of an amazing statement the apostle Paul has already made in Romans 3:28: “We hold that one is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.” What an amazing, shocking statement: one is made right before God, by faith, apart from what one does (the works of the law). Surely there would be a challenge to such an audacious statement, and so the apostle decides to give an example. Particularly for the sake of the Jews who had been gathering in the Roman church with Gentile believers, the example would have to be that of Abraham. In

effect Paul says concerning Abraham, “You must remember that he was justified by faith apart from the works of the law, because the law wasn’t even there yet.” But what that begins to demonstrate is not only the greatness of the provision of God but the greatness of his mercy toward us, that he would provide righteousness for those who could not provide it for themselves.

So we read in Romans 4:18, “In hope, [Abraham] believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, ‘So shall your offspring be.’” What does it mean to hope against hope? Some of you know of the Stockdale Paradox, which was introduced to us in Jim Collins’s book *Good to Great*. It refers to Admiral Jim Stockdale, the high-ranking officer who was the prisoner held longest in the infamous Hanoi Hilton during the Vietnam War—after being shot down and wounded, he was held there for seven and a half long years.

You may know what pressures were placed upon him, but many wonderful things were written about his leadership in a difficult time—he was even willing to continue to wound himself to prove to his captors that torture could not persuade him to betray his country. When Jim Collins asked Stockdale what had sustained him and given him hope when there was no hope, Stockdale answered, “I never lost faith in the end of the story. I never doubted not only that I would get out, but that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining moment of my life.”

When Collins asked, “Who did not make it out of the Hanoi Hilton?” Stockdale replied, “That’s easy. The optimists did not make it out. They are the ones who said, ‘We’re going to be out by Christmas,’ and Christmas would come and Christmas would go. And then they’d say, ‘We’re going to be out by Easter.’ And Easter would come and Easter would go. And then

Thanksgiving, and then it was Christmas again. And they died of a broken heart.”

To such men, Stockdale said he would say, “We are not getting home by Christmas, so deal with it.” He told Collins how he taught others and himself to deal with such deprivations and disappointments. He said, “This is the most important lesson. You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end, which you can never afford to lose, with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they may be.”¹

In a nutshell the Stockdale Paradox is this: believing profoundly that your life’s story will turn out well, while at the same moment confronting the most brutal facts of your present reality.

Those are inspiring words, but for us as believers, there’s a certain hollowness to them, because while Stockdale says with great firmness and stridency, “You must believe that the end will turn out well,” you and I know there was no guarantee he would get out of prison alive. In essence, he was pitting one hope against another hope. His hope was optimism in a long-term good end, and he pitted that against others’ optimism in a short-term good end. The reality is that both these types of optimism are human optimism with the limitation of human ability.

More Than Human Hope

When he speaks of hope against hope in Romans 4, the apostle is not saying, “There is one form of human optimism

1. Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2001), 83–85.

that's better than another form of human optimism." He is saying there has to be a totally different hope from human hope. It cannot be based on humanity's abilities, goodness, will, and resolve. There is a scriptural hope that is of a different nature and quality from human hope; it is a divine hope, a hope in the greatness of God, not in the greatness of human ability, resolve, or righteousness.

If you work through Paul's account of Abraham in Romans 4, you quite clearly recognize what he is saying. What we're forced to do initially is to face the brutal facts. We do that first because we're exposed to Abraham's "hoped for" end. What does Abraham hope for? "In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, 'So shall your offspring be'" (v. 18).

What was Abraham's initial hope? *Abraham* means "father of nations, father of a multitude." Keeping that in mind, the good outcome for which he hoped was simply that his name would come true. But the brutal reality he had to face is in verse 19. "He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb." These are not pleasant or politically correct words: he's as good as dead, and she's barren.

Although we can read the words quickly, we understand the pain behind them. Abraham can't produce children anymore. He received the promise of God at age seventy-five, but now he's ninety-nine and has no children. His wife is barren, not just in that period of time, but since her youth. There was, particularly in that culture, a shame, a sense of unfulfillment that came to a couple—and particularly to a woman—who were unable to have children. But the brutal facts are these: he's as good as dead, and she's barren.

They lived in a different era. Abraham had longevity in a number of ways. He apparently was still strong enough to make a journey of several hundred miles by foot with a caravan, with all the travails that went into that. And even though his wife was older, Sarah was apparently beautiful, because she could still tempt kings. But neither of them is able to bear children. He's initially seventy-five and will be ninety-nine before he sees any fulfillment of promise; she has never been able to bear children. Neither is worthy. When God declares that the promise will be fulfilled, Abraham laughs and falls on his face. Sarah laughs and lies about laughing. They're not able. They're not worthy. The brutal fact is that this had to be a horrible waiting period as they faced the reality of their own inability.

What must it have been like for Abraham to have been told at age seventy-five that he was going to have a son—and then to have to wait for almost twenty-five years? Ray Pritchard described it this way:

At age 76 Abraham buys a crib. Imagine going to the store. “Well, Grandpa, for the grandkid?” “No this is for me and my wife.” Age 77, pick out colors for the baby’s room and paint the room. Age 78, the list of baby names is getting really long. Age 80, sign up for a diaper service. Age 82, subscribe to *Parents* magazine. Age 85, re-subscribe to *New Parents* magazine. Age 95, repaint the baby’s room. Age 99, attend Lamaze classes with your wife, and between blows (puff, puff, puff), scratch your head and say, “Was God just kidding?”²

In Genesis 18, when he is given the announcement of the coming of Isaac, Abraham laughs and falls on his face. You have

2. Paraphrased from Ray Pritchard, “The Oldest Dad in the Nursery—Romans 4:18–25,” *Keep Believing Ministries*, accessed November 26, 2013, <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1992-05-24-The-Oldest-Dad-in-the-Nursery/>.

to understand his response is not humor but the release of deep emotional pain. He collapses. He is not able to take the news. Yet Paul declares, “No distrust made him waiver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God” (Rom. 4:20).

How astounding to say that Abraham is not trusting in the character of his circumstances, for they are terrible. No, he is trusting in the character of his God. “Why should I keep trusting? Why should I not waiver in faith? It’s not because my circumstances indicate that I shouldn’t waiver in faith; it’s because I have trust in my God.” What Abraham has from his God is the promise of a son, and because he has that promise he does not waiver. The reason we are not to waiver in the awful circumstances we face is not because of the promise of a son but because of the *provision* of a Son. That is what God has shown to us, and it’s one of the most difficult but important aspects of pastoral ministry and Christian faith: to say, “When my circumstances give me no reason to trust God, I trust him because of his character.”

A few years ago I was picked up prior to a theology conference. The man who drove me from the airport to the conference was a man I’d known for some time, a ruling elder in a Presbyterian church. As he was driving me from the airport, he began to unfold the details of his life in recent years. He had a son in prison, a daughter living with a man who was not her husband, a church in turmoil, and no sense that anybody was coming around him to support him and his family despite his suffering. Finally he asked me, “Bryan, how do I trust God in the midst of all this?” I don’t know if you are like me, but in those moments I feel absolutely tongue-tied. I’m supposed to know the ready answers, but all I could say was, “I trust him because he sent Jesus.” God’s Word tells

me that this is a fallen world, that we will go through a veil of tears because it is a corrupted world, and that if you are looking to trust God on the basis of circumstances, you will be sorely and awfully disappointed. We do not look to circumstances; we look to God.

My early pastoral experience was spent ministering in a mining and farming community. I learned so much about faith from people of faith, though not quite in the terms I had learned in seminary. I learned what it meant to trust God in the hardest of times by hearing the account of an older miner who had been injured early in life in the mines. Because of what had happened, he spent the rest of his life as an invalid, watching family and friends prosper while he himself lived in great deprivation.

In old age he was approached one day by a younger man, who said to him, "I hear that you are a man of faith. How can you be one who trusts in God, with all the hardships that have happened in your life?"

Lying on his bed as an invalid, the older man said with great candor and honesty, "You are right. There are times when Satan sits in the chair that you are sitting in and asks me those very questions. He points out the window to men who are my age who have worked in the mine and have prospered, and he points to their fine homes and their expanded families when I have none. Satan says to me, 'Does Jesus really love you?' Satan points to younger men and older men whose bodies are still strong, without the broken legs that I have, and Satan points to their healthy bodies and says, 'Does Jesus really love you?'"

The younger man was left aghast at the honesty of the older. "What do you say? What do you say when Satan speaks to you that way?"

The older man said, “I take Satan by the hand, and I take him to a hill called Calvary. And I point to the thorns on the brow and the nails in the hands and I say to him, ‘Doesn’t Jesus love me?’”

Abraham looks at his circumstances, with perhaps no reason to believe in the goodness or the greatness of God, but he looks to the character of God and says, “He has promised me a son. His righteousness is yet on display in the character that he is showing me. I have no basis of faith in my circumstances, but my faith is based on the character of my God. And for that reason, I endure.” What is the nature of that faith that will sustain such hope? It is that God is great and good and is accomplishing his purposes despite the denial of apparent circumstances. What is the faith that really sustains hope? Paul notes, “No distrust made him waiver concerning the promise of God,” because he believed in the God who had promised him a son (Rom. 4:20).

Not the Faith of a Perfect Man

If you think of the kind of faith that sustains hope in a great God, you must know first that it is not the faith of a perfect man. After all, what do we know about the life of Abraham? Yes, God gives him a promise: “I am going to give you a son.” And Abraham believes, but he’s not exactly sure how God is going to bring that about, so he decides to contribute a little bit by taking his wife’s handmaiden to bed. And then, after she conceives, there is dissension in the house—surprise, surprise—and he casts out of his home the very woman he has taken advantage of, knowing that this will probably be a death sentence for her. “You take care of

yourself. My wife is upset with you because of what I have done with you.”

Although he does take her back into his home, Abraham’s unfaithfulness is not just to his mistress. He is also unfaithful, and repeatedly so, to his wife. The jeopardy of being in a foreign land with an attractive wife causes him twice to give her away to other men in order to protect himself.

Beyond that, remember the haggling over Sodom? “Lord, I know it’s filthy sin, but if there are just fifty righteous people there, or forty-five, or forty, or thirty, or twenty, or ten . . .” He haggles to protect the sinful.

Not only does he laugh when Isaac is promised, but he also decides he has to take care of the problem he has created through his wife’s handmaiden. Because she has borne his own biological son, he takes the two of them and sends them out into the desert to die of exposure. This is not the faith of a perfect man. If God is going to save him, there is going to be some great mercy on display. That great goodness of God is what we see in verse 21: “[Abraham was] fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.”

What is Abraham convinced of? Not of his goodness, but of God’s greatness. He can do as he promised. Abraham can say, “I’m ninety-nine years old, my wife has been barren for our whole marriage, but God is able to do as he has promised. He can bring dead things to life. That is the nature of my God, and I will believe that.”

If it seems hypocritical of Abraham to say that, you have to understand that in Scripture it is the nature of faith to be often expressed by very imperfect people. The greatness of God’s provision on display is not the greatness of the people who express faith; it’s the greatness of a God who would receive such defective faith. Note the instance of the man who comes to Jesus saying,

“Save my child.” Jesus says, “All things are possible for one who believes,” but then the man says, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (see Mark 9:24).

Here is Abraham. You recognize the Scriptures are extolling his faith over and over, but you know enough about his life to know his is a very defective faith. It just barely holds on to the notion, “I guess God is able. Maybe I’ve got to help him, but he’s going to do it some way.” And I myself need to be reminded from time to time that God is blessing me, holding me, maintaining his faithfulness not because of *my* faithfulness but because of *his*. My faithfulness is too weak; it’s too stretched despite all that I know in my head.

I recently spoke with a church elder who said, “When God took my son, my faith became stretched like taffy, so thin and so transparent I was sure it would break. It was that thin. I wasn’t sure I had faith anymore. And still God honored it. I still believe his promises are eternal; I still believe that he has my son even if I don’t and that in the great day I will see him again.”

What does it mean to believe that you’re trusting in the greatness of God and not in the greatness of you? It means that you understand that the circumstances are meant to strip you away from confidence in you so that there’s nothing left but faith in God. That’s what’s happening to Abraham. He has left home, familiarity, wealth, and security to give himself to this God who has called him to a foreign land, and now this God seems to be supplying nothing, and it’s almost as though the circumstances of his life are stripping away every confidence that Abraham might have in his own ability and supply so that there may be nothing left but God. What else would he have? God is all he has left.

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the spoiled kid Eustace sails away and ends up on an island, where he discovers what he thinks

he wants: a great treasure in a cave. Having found the treasure and rejoiced over it, he lies down on it and falls asleep, not knowing that in this magical cave what he dreams will now shape and form him. As he lies on this treasure, he dreams of the vengeance that he will wreak on all those who he perceives have wronged him in life, and when he wakes up, he has been transformed into a dragon: ugly, awful, mean, bitter, and dangerous to all around him. He doesn't want to be a dragon, but that is what he is.

But the great lion Aslan shows up and tells the boy, now covered in dragon skin, that he must undress. After balking initially, thinking that he can't undress because he isn't wearing any clothes, the boy-turned-dragon realizes that he can cast his skin.

Telling the story afterward, Eustace explains, "I started scratching myself and my scales began coming off all over the place. And then I scratched a little deeper and, instead of just scales coming off here and there, my whole skin started peeling off beautifully, like it does after an illness, or as if I was a banana."

But although he is able to step out of his skin entirely, he finds that he has another ugly dragon's skin underneath the first one. Although his scratching tears it away, he finds another ugly skin under that one too. "And I thought to myself," Eustace relates in retrospect, "'Oh dear, how ever many skins have I got to take off?'"

Finally Aslan takes over. "You will have to let me undress you." Eustace is afraid of the lion's claws, but he is desperate. "The very first tear he made," Eustace remembers, "was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I've ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peel off."³

3. C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York: MacMillan, 1970), 89–90.

Do you know what I'm talking about? You thought you had it, you thought you understood it, you thought your faith was worked out, you thought it was kind of sweet the way this God was taking care of you, and you and God were walking along together and you were doing just fine. And because you were doing just fine, he was loving you so well and life was pleasant—but then suddenly you find out he is saying, “Are you depending on you or on me? Where is your faith? Is it in the adequacy of your faith, your performance, your doing? If that's the case, you're going to have to let me go deeper, to let me undress you.”

You may know exactly what I mean, through a loss or a pain or a failure or a disquieting uncertainty about your adequacy such as you've never known before. You must recognize that God is saying, “When you strip away every aspect of your life in which you have confidence, there's nothing left for you but to put faith in me. There's nothing else left.” The reason you can put faith in the adequacy of your God is because, even though you are quite imperfect, he is great. The degrees and nature of his greatness are now being unfolded to us because he is able. That was what Abraham believed: not that Abraham was able, but that his God was able.

Paul writes of Abraham, “His faith was counted to him as righteousness” (Rom. 4:22). We're learning something not just about the nature of faith that sustains hope but about the nature of faith that is attached to grace. What is the grace that provides the hope that is so exemplified in the faith of Abraham? It's plainly stated: “His faith was counted to him as righteousness.” But how could that be?

Faith . . . Counted to Him as Righteousness

You have to back up to verse 20 again to understand the point the apostle is making. “No distrust made [Abraham] waiver

concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God.” You have to clearly understand one thing: if Abraham grew strong in his faith, that means that at some point his faith was not as strong as it later became. There was a defect, a weakness in his faith so that it wasn’t what it ultimately became. What it ultimately became was a consequence of his giving glory to God.

The faith that was counted to him for righteousness was that faith that had every aspect of self-confidence stripped away so that all Abraham could do was give glory to God. That’s all that was left, to the point where Abraham could say, “God is all I have. God’s the only thing left. He can be faithful to his promise. I don’t know how, I don’t know when, but I believe that God can do what God says he’s going to do.” Abraham had buried himself, his hope, his ability—he had buried everything in his hope of what God is and what God can do. There was no hope in himself anymore. It’s the Old Testament image of being clothed in God. All he had left was the glory of God, and we are told that this is where his faith ended up, not where it began.

There had to be the stripping away of trust in self to the point where Abraham ultimately said, “It’s just God; there is nothing else. Not my faith, not my doing, not my performing. All I’ve got is God. I can’t even trust my own faithfulness; all I’ve got is him.” When that’s what we have, we understand that God is saying, “If you have buried yourself in me, what’s true of me is true of you. I am the righteous God who will keep my promises and who is able to do so. Great in righteousness, great in power—when you bury yourself in me, what’s true of me is now true of you.”

That’s the great promise of the gospel, isn’t it? Faith is counted as righteousness. That’s as true for us as it was for Abraham.

The great promise of Scripture is not just that Abraham's faith was counted for righteousness; it's the promise available to all believers that faith still is counted for righteousness, as Paul proclaims in Romans 4:23–24:

But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord.

Faith in God's Power and Provision

What is your faith? It must be faith in the greatness of the power of God. He can make dead things alive. He could make Abraham, who was as good as dead in his ability to produce children, alive. He can make a dead man alive. He can make a dead womb alive. He could make a dead Jesus alive. And he can make a dead *you* alive. That's what we're ultimately trusting in. Here is a God so great that he makes dead things live. Ultimately I need to know this because, when I have been stripped of every confidence in myself, stripped of every confidence in my performance, I have to believe there's nothing I bring to this equation. There's no reason that God should love me or provide for me or equip me with his righteousness. I just trust him—faith alone in a God who makes dead things live—because that is faith in the greatness of the power of God alone and distinct from any power I possess.

But it's not just faith in God's power. Ultimately it's faith in God's provision. God raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who Paul tells us in verse 25 “was delivered up for our tres-

passes and raised for our justification.” What is this greatness of God? Paul has expressed it already in Romans 3:25. “[This Jesus] God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.” Recognizing the inadequacy of his people, our great God provided his own Son as the sacrifice, taking upon himself your sin, my sin, and the sin of the world. What we don’t quite understand is the greatness of God’s provision. Sufficient for the sin of the world is this sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He took all that we deserve. That penalty, taken upon him, is taken off those who put their faith upon him. It is a great provision.

The hard part for many theologians is not the first part of Romans 4:25, that Jesus “was delivered up for our trespasses.” We know what that’s about: the penalty our sins deserve. The harder part is “and raised for our justification.” I thought he was crucified for our justification, but here Paul tells us that Christ was “raised for our justification.” It’s the apostle’s reminder of the greatness of the power of God that makes us right before God.

I think of the similarities between these words and those in the incident of Jesus and the paralytic. The paralytic can’t move, and his friends can’t move him through the crowd, so what do they do? They let him down through a hole they make in the roof, and Jesus, instead of verbally declaring to him the ability to walk, says, “Son, your sins are forgiven” (Mark 2:5). Of course, everybody’s really happy about this, right? “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (v. 7). In response Jesus says, “But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . . I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home” (vv. 10–11).

When he gives life to dead things, as Jesus did with this man’s paralyzed legs, we know that God has such power; the

One who says, “I will take away your sins” can do it. It is the life of Jesus, raised from the tomb, that gives the proof that we are justified before God. Our sin has been put away, and the fact that he is raised again proves that God says, “Your sins are forgiven.”

Christ has accomplished this. It is God’s ability to give life to dead things that ultimately proves not only his greatness but also the greatness of his mercy toward us. As we are fond of saying, where there is life, there is hope. It is the life of Christ, which you and I share by virtue of faith in him, not in anything in us, that ultimately gives us hope in the greatness of a God whose greatness extends not only to his power but to his mercy toward us.

Do you remember the great earthquake in Haiti in 2010? One of the amazing stories that came out of that disaster was of Frank and Jill Thorpe. Frank was almost a hundred miles away in the mountains when he received a call from his wife on her cell phone. She was trapped underground in the rubble of a building. He immediately drove for six hours through the devastated country to get to his wife, and upon arriving where she was, he dug for hours to get to her. Why would he go through all this effort? Because where there is life, there is hope. He knew that it was worth the striving, worth the faith to go after his wife, worth the willingness to live, to dig, to serve, to honor.

Because Jesus is alive, I believe that my God is able to fulfill his promises, just as he provided a son for Abraham when there was no hope in all that was human. But there was a divine hope that sustained faith. The fact that Jesus was raised from the dead gives me reason to believe and have faith when my faith is defective. When my hope seems almost gone, I hope against human hope in the divine work

of God, because he has shown me the greatness of his power and mercy in the provision of Jesus Christ. When I believe in him, then when all else has abandoned me and I have no hope in anything else, I bring to the table faith alone in God alone. That is my hope: because he is so great, when all my efforts fail, all his greatness is in my path.

One God. Three persons. Our triune God.

While the workings of the Trinity challenge our understanding, Bible-believing Christians cannot let themselves downplay the Trinity or ignore it. We find the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each present throughout the pages of Scripture—and each equally deserving of our love and reverence.

This book, while not attempting to define or explain the Trinity, dedicates equal space to examining the qualities and roles of each member as we find them in the Bible, to help us grow in our knowledge and understanding. To do so, the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals has gathered essays from leading pastors and preachers on:

GOD THE FATHER

Bryan Chapell

Richard D. Phillips

Kevin DeYoung

The Greatness of God • The Love of God

The Holiness of God • The Wrath of God

The Truth of God

GOD THE SON

D. A. Carson

Joel R. Beeke

Iain M. Duguid

The Glory of the Son • Our Risen Savior

The Incarnate Word • The Cross of Christ

The Life and Ministry of Jesus

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

D. A. Carson

Michael S. Horton

Philip Graham Ryken

Hywel Jones

R. C. Sproul

Streams of Living Water

The Age of the Spirit

Born of the Spirit

Life in the Spirit

Holy Spirit, Counselor

These addresses will make us more familiar with each person of the Trinity and will show us how to rightly respond to each one. The more we know how to relate to the Trinity, the more we can enrich our love for our triune God.

XX

RONALD L. KOHL is the senior pastor of Grace Bible Fellowship Church in Quakertown, Pennsylvania, and he organizes the annual Quakertown Conference on Reformed Theology. Prior to that, Ron was a youth pastor and a sports journalist. He still writes sports reports for his local newspaper.



ALLIANCE[®]
OF CONFESSING EVANGELICALS



PUBLISHING

www.prpbooks.com

COVER DESIGN: CHRISTOPHER TOBIAS
www.tobiasdesign.com
COVER IMAGE: © Ig0rZh / FOTOLIA.COM

THEOLOGY / GENERAL

ISBN: 978-1-59638-981-6

EAN



5 1 4 9 9



9

781596 389816