

Doctrine of the Trinity Part 2

Steve Lewis

High Peaks Bible Fellowship

Introduction

The first part of this study examined the doctrine of the Trinity from a theological perspective. It discussed many of the concepts which form the basis for a proper biblical definition of the Trinity, as well as some principles of interpretation for using the exegesis of a specific passage to construct a doctrine of systematic theology. With the preceding concepts in mind, the purpose of this study will be to analyze a key passage of Scripture to discover its contribution to the doctrine of the Trinity. This passage states: *“When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.”* (John 15:26-27, NASB)

Overview of John 15:26-27 from a Trinitarian Perspective

The Gospel of John as a whole contains a wide variety of Scriptural evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity and it could be described as the beginning of systematic theological thought concerning the nature of the Godhead.

Through John’s Gospel runs the richest vein in the NT for the Church’s doctrine of the trinity -- a wide, deep, and subtle account of divine distinction-within-unity. In John, Father, Son, and Spirit/Paraclete are clearly distinct divine persons, who play differentiated roles in the general divine enterprise of life-giving and life-disclosing. Yet their primordial and unexplained unity is revealed and exemplified by common will, work, word, and knowledge, and by reciprocal love and glorifying. The same six phenomena that distinguish the persons -- especially by subordination of Son and Spirit -- also unite them....In John’s Gospel one finds “the beginning of dogmatic reflection in the strictest possible sense,” for John displays real interest in what would later be called the mystery of the holy trinity (Kasemann, pp. 23, 49).¹

Regarding John 15:26, Van Doren declares, “This verse furnishes decisive proof of the doctrine of the Trinity. Both the essential identity and the personal distinction of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit, are clearly stated (compare also xiv. 16, 18, 26; xvi. 7, 13; xx. 22).”² Lange elaborates on the importance of John 15:26 as a supporting passage for the Trinity when he says, “This is one of the principal proof-texts for the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Both the essential identity and the personal distinction of the Father (παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς), of the Son (ἐγὼ

¹ Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: Vol IV*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 917, 918.

² William H. Van Doren, *Gospel of John: Expository and Homiletical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1981), 1157.

πεμψω), and of the Holy Spirit (ελθη ὁ παρακλητος) are very clearly stated, especially when compared with 14:16, 18, 26; 20:22. Our passage is also the *locus classicus* for the technical word *procession* of the Holy Ghost.”³

In regard to the place of the Holy Spirit in the Godhead, Turner and Mantey have stated: “This is one of the most important Paraclete verses. In this one verse one may find arguments for proving that (1) the Spirit came from the Father through the Son (the view of Eastern Orthodoxy) or that (2) the Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son (the Roman Catholic view). This was one of the causes for the historical split between the eastern and western churches -- the Great Schism.”⁴ It appears, then, that this passage contains some of the key building blocks for the doctrine of the Trinity. It will be the task of the following sections to determine how the truths revealed in John 15:26-27 contribute to this doctrine.

Contextual Outline of John 15:26-27

It is important to understand the specific passage currently under study in light of the context and message of the Gospel of John as a whole. The Gospel of John contains much information about the relationships between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Son in John is on a mission: He does not do His own will, but that of His Father, the One who sent Him (4:34; 5:30, 38; 8:29). Though the Son has a will of His own (17:24), He subordinates it to the Father. The Spirit in John is subordinate in turn to the Son. He functions as pure agent, bestowed by Jesus (1:33; 20:22) and sent as Paraclete (14:26; 15:26; 16:13ff) to combine the functions of advocating legal assistance and comforter to the community of believers. Yet this very super- and subordination of wills that distinguishes the three also unites them. For only one divine will is expressed -- that of the Father who sends the Son and (with the Son) the Spirit....The functional subordination of Son and Spirit insures that only one message is taught.... [They] seem to function as ways of expressing distributive subordination of divine roles in life-giving and also as expressions of primordial divine in-ness or oneness (10:30, 38) of Father, Son, and Spirit....There is little doubt that John presents a functional “hierarchy,” the Father ultimately in control. Son and Spirit seem relatively unoriginal in function. They are always sent. The Spirit never sends the Son on missions, and neither Son nor Spirit ever sends the Father.⁵

In looking at the events portrayed in the book of John, it becomes apparent that Jesus revealed Himself in “ever-widening circles (a few disciples, His mother and friends at Cana, to Jerusalem, ‘the land of Judea,’ Samaria, Galilee), but is rejected both in Jerusalem and Galilee.”⁶

³ John P. Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: John*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, reprint of the 1897 edition), 469.

⁴ George A. Turner and Julius R. Mantey, *The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 309.

⁵ Bromiley, 917.

⁶ Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967), 441.

When He made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (declaring Himself as Messiah), the Greeks were drawn to Him but the Jews rejected Him. “So He *turns* -- and this is indeed a *turning point* in this Gospel -- to the inner circle, and tenderly instructs the Twelve in the Upper Room.”⁷

In the “Upper Room Discourse” Jesus comforted His disciples, admonished them, and explained to them what was to come. In the last section of John Chapter 15, Jesus told of the opposition and hostility of the world toward Him and toward anyone who followed Him.

Bernard describes the immediate context of John 15:26-27 in these words:

Verses 26-27 follow at once upon the rebuke (vv. 21-25) pronounced upon the enemies of Jesus. Their hostility was blameworthy. And in the future they will be proved in the wrong by the witness of the Spirit (v. 26) as well as by the witness of the apostles (v. 27). The rendering of ‘ο παρακλητος by advocate is here demanded by the context, to which the rendering comforter would be quite foreign. Jesus had explained that the hostility of the Jews to Him was sinful, for they ought to have recognised His Divine mission in His words and works (vv. 22-24). They hated Him, not knowing Him, although they ought to have known Him. But when the Paraclete came, He would bear true testimony to Jesus, being indeed the Spirit of Truth (v. 26). The Paraclete is the Divine *advocatus* defending the Righteous One, and pleading His cause against false accusers. He is not, as at 1 Jn 2:1, represented as pleading the cause of man with God, but rather as pleading the cause of Christ with the world.⁸

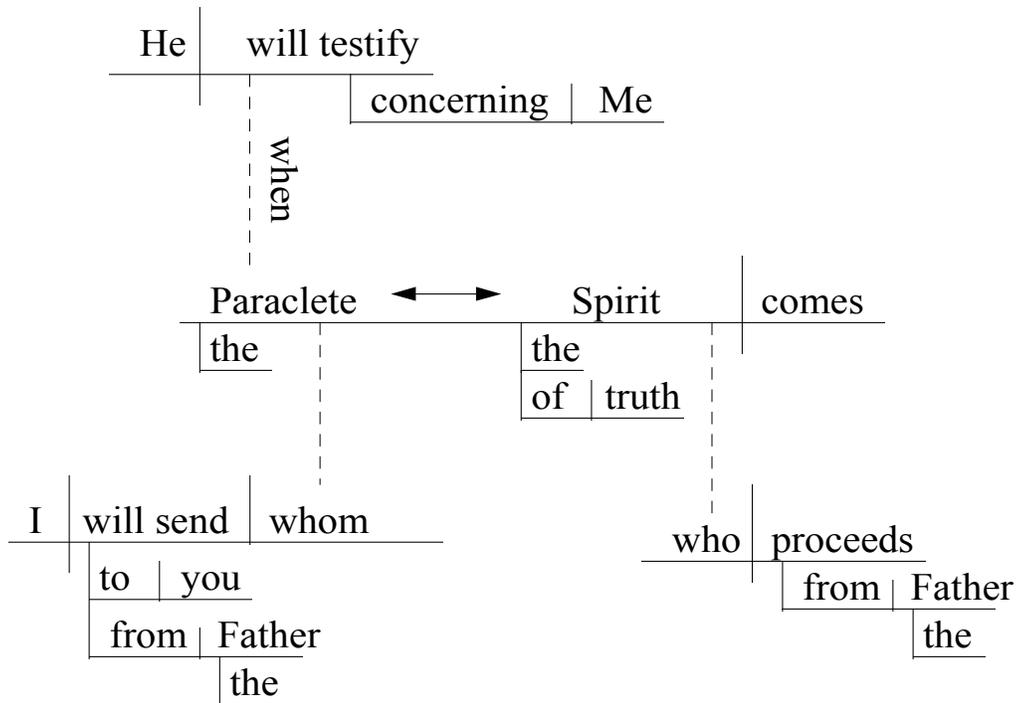
The immediate context, then, of John 15:26-27 involves Jesus’ response to the animosity and opposition of the world. He encouraged His closest followers with the important message of the coming of the Spirit of Truth to help them carry on in His absence.

Grammatical Observations on John 15:26-27

Since John 15:26 is the key verse which contains concepts regarding the Trinity, a diagram has been constructed to show the relationships of the various parts of the sentence.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ J. H. Bernard, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John: Vol II, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928), 498.



The main subject-verb in the clause is “He will testify,” and this indicates that the emphasis of this verse is on the work of witnessing which the Holy Spirit will accomplish when He comes. However, the subordinate clauses contain several important truths about the Holy Spirit and His relationship to God the Father and God the Son. In the following sections, specific grammatical observations will be given for each phrase of this passage in order to explore its contribution to the doctrine of the Trinity.

“When the Paraclete comes”

One feature of this phrase is that the second aorist subjunctive indicates an undefined time reference, and its position in the sentence emphasizes the *coming* action of the Paraclete. Morris adds, “We should also observe that the ὅταν which introduces the verse leaves the time indefinite, whenever.”⁹ Another feature of this phrase is the use of the noun for *Paraclete*. Bernard provides some lexical insights and explains how this word is exclusively used by the apostle John:

The term παρακλητος does not occur in the Greek Bible outside the Johannine writings. On the other hand, John does not use παρακαλεῖν or παρακλήσις, the latter word being specially Lucan and Pauline, while the former is common to most of the N. T. writers.

⁹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 684.

Etymologically, παρακλητος is a passive form, and is equivalent to the Latin *advocatus*, signifying one who is “called in” to give help or advise, and being especially used of the counsel for defense. In classical writers this is always the meaning....Although the verb παρακαλειν does not appear in John, an examination of its usage throws some additional light on the meaning of παρακλητος. παρακαλειν is to call a person to stand by one (παρα), and hence to help in various ways, e.g. (a) as a witness, to be present when a thing is done; (b) as an adviser; (c) as an advocate. The verb is specially applied to the invoking of a god, and calling him to help. It appears from these passages that παρακλητος is naturally used for a Divine helper called in, either as a witness (15:26), or as an advocate (16:8), or as an adviser (16:13).¹⁰

When discussing the use of the word *Paraclete*, it should be pointed out that, although the Holy Spirit is more often in mind, the word was also used in reference to Jesus:

We should note that the first mention of the Paraclete in John speaks of him as “another Paraclete” (John 14:16), with the clear implication that Jesus is also a Paraclete. Inevitably we recall 1 John 2:1, the only passage outside of John 14-16 where the term occurs: If anyone sins we have a Paraclete with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. Here Jesus is depicted as an intercessor in the court of heaven, representing the cause of his own, whereas the Holy Spirit is the Paraclete from heaven, supporting his own in the face of a hostile world. The ministries of the two Paracletes, however, are thought of not as simultaneous, but as successive. The Spirit-Paraclete takes the place of the Paraclete Jesus after Jesus’ departure to the Father.¹¹

It is clear from this that in functioning as *Paracletes*, Jesus and the Spirit each have a different focus. They both serve as *Paracletes*, but not in the same respect. Regarding the role of the Holy Spirit, Burge states the commonly held view of His function:

Parakletos (generally translated “Counselor” or “Comforter”) should be taken as “Advocate” since it is a judicial title describing someone aiding a legal argument. The Spirit-Paraclete will not only live in the disciples, enabling them to recall the words of Jesus (14:26); now he will become a witness, supporting their trial (either literally or figuratively).¹²

One further question is, “When will the Paraclete come?” The simple answer to this question is, “When He is sent,” and the sending of the Holy Spirit will be discussed in the next section.

¹⁰ Bernard, 496-7.

¹¹ George R. Beasley-Murray, *Gospel of Life: Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 73.

¹² Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 421.

“Whom I will send to you from the Father”

The first interesting feature of this phrase is the emphatic use of the pronoun *εγω*, which underscores Christ’s active role in the process of sending the Holy Spirit. Newman and Nida also point out, “The locational relations in the clause ‘I will send him to you from the Father’ are rather complex; and since the role of Jesus as the agent is primarily causative, it may be necessary to translate this clause ‘I will cause him to go from the Father and to come to you.’”¹³

The BAGD lexicon classifies the use of *πεμπω* in John 15:26 under “the sending of human beings and other beings of a personal character,”¹⁴ and it goes on to say that “John’s gospel is dominated by the thought that Jesus is sent by God from heaven” and “Jesus, or God in His name, will send the Paraclete or Holy Spirit.”¹⁵ The usage of *πεμπω* in this particular case, then, implies the personality of the one being sent.

Regarding the time of the sending of the Spirit, Hendriksen declares, “The sending of the Spirit was a matter of the future. Pentecost had not yet arrived. Hence, the future tense is used: ‘I will send.’”¹⁶ Godet adds this comment: “In saying: *whom I will send*, Jesus is necessarily thinking of His approaching reinstatement in the divine condition; and in adding: *from the Father*, He acknowledges His subordination to the Father, even when He shall have recovered that condition.”¹⁷ Morris also explains the time of the Spirit’s coming:

Jesus is surely saying that, when he leaves this earth to go to be with his Father, he will send the Spirit to them, the Spirit who is with the Father. There appears to be some emphasis on the fact that, even though it is Jesus who will send the Spirit, it is from the Father that he will send him. Indeed, it can be said that it is from the Father then the Spirit ‘proceeds.’”¹⁸

Just as the first phrase of John 15:26 emphasizes the active role of the Spirit in *coming*, this second phrase emphasizes the active role of Christ in *sending* the Spirit. Bernard introduces the different ways in which the sending of the Spirit is stated: “So also at 16:7, the promise is that Jesus will send the Paraclete; but at 14:16 He is to be given by the Father in response to the prayer of Jesus, and at 14:26 the Father is to send Him in the Name of Jesus. The Lucan doctrine is that Jesus sends the Spirit, the promise of the Father (Luke 24:49, Acts 2:33).”¹⁹ Morris explains this issue in the following words:

¹³ Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of John*, (New York: United Bible Societies, 1980), 497.

¹⁴ Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BAGD), (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 641.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 642.

¹⁶ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids: Baker book House, 1953), 317.

¹⁷ Frederick L. Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of John: Vol II*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, reprint of 1893 edition), 304.

¹⁸ Leon Morris, *Expository Reflections on the Gospel of John*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 533.

¹⁹ Bernard, 498.

Notice that whereas in 14:16 Jesus said that the Father would give the Spirit in response to His prayer, and in 14:26 that the Father would send Him in Christ's name, now Jesus says that He Himself will send Him from the Father. Notice the use of the emphatic *ἐγώ*....It is plain that the Spirit is regarded as being connected in the most intimate fashion with both the Father and the Son. The sending of the Spirit is an activity which concerns them both.²⁰

The question then becomes, "Who is sending the Spirit?" Is it the Father or the Son or both of them? Is there an actual inconsistency between these seemingly contradictory statements of Scripture? Van Doren makes this observation: "The sending by the Father in answer to the Son's prayer, the sending by the Father in the Son's name, and the sending by the Son Himself, are thought of as one sending."²¹ Turner and Mantey have added:

In 14:16 Jesus will take the initiative in asking for the coming of the Paraclete but the Father sends Him; here Jesus will send Him. The significance lies not in the apparent contradiction but in the intimacy of the connection between Father and Son. Likewise in 14:26 the sender is the Father but the gift is in the name of the Son and in response to the Son's request as in 14:15. Here, although the Paraclete proceeds from the Father, he is sent by the Son and bears witness to the Son; so the association is very intimate indeed. As in Acts, so here, the function of the Spirit is to bear witness to Christ along with the disciples (cf. Acts 1:8; 4:29-33).²²

There do appear to be several ways of viewing the sending of the Holy Spirit based on these passages, and Morris clarifies the issue in the following words:

Jesus says, "I will send" him and send him "from the Father." There is a variety of ways of looking at the sending of the Spirit, and elsewhere we find that Jesus prays to the Father that he would send the Spirit (14:16). Or it may be said that the Father sends the Spirit in Christ's name (14:26). Again, Jesus can say simply that he will send the Spirit (16:7). From all this it seems that in some way both the Father and the Son are involved in the sending of the Spirit. We ought not to think of division or of compartmentalization within the Godhead. Clearly these various ways of putting it bring out the truth that all three persons of the Godhead take part in bringing to believers the help they need as they seek to do their service of God in this difficult world.²³

It is clear, then, that all of the Persons of the Trinity are involved in the ministry described here. The important truth expressed by Morris is that we must not think of any kind of division, partition, or compartmentalization within the Godhead. Even though there are several ways of stating the sending of the Spirit, they are all describing a single sending.

²⁰ Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 684.

²¹ Van Doren, 1157.

²² Turner and Mantey, 309-310.

²³ Morris, *Expository Reflections*, 533.

“The Spirit of Truth”

Here the Holy Spirit is characterized by the quality of truth. Lange explains how this revelation is built upon a previous statement of His qualities: “He is first promised as the Spirit of faith and of the living knowledge of Christ (14:16). Here He is promised as the Spirit of steadfast testimony for Christ.”²⁴ In describing why the quality of truth is emphasized, Godet declares: “Jesus here designates the Spirit as *Spirit of truth*, in order to place Him in opposition to the falsehood of the world, to its voluntary ignorance. The Spirit will dissipate the darkness in which it tries to envelop itself.”²⁵ This sense of the true testimony to be given by the Holy Spirit is certainly evident in this phrase, but there is also something deeper that reflects the very nature or character of the Holy Spirit, as Bernard points out in the following words:

In these Last Discourses, το πνευμα της αληθειας is but another name for the Paraclete who is to be sent after Jesus has been withdrawn from the sight of men. The spirit of truth is the Spirit which brings truth and impresses it on the conscience of the world. In this passage the leading thought is of the witness of the Spirit to Jesus, infallibly true, however perverted the opinion of the world about Him may be. The phrase το πνευμα της αληθειας has a double meaning. Primarily (a) it is the Spirit which brings truth and gives true testimony, but (b) this is the case because the Spirit has truth as the essential characteristic of His being. So, also, the Logos is πληρης αληθειας (1:14), and Jesus says, later in this discourse, εγω ειμι...α αληθεια (14:6).²⁶

Not only is the Holy Spirit the One who acts truly and testifies truly, but He is also the One who *is truth* at the essence or core of His existence.

Abbott classifies John 15:26 under the use of apposition to explain or define:

Apposition is a method of expressing the phrase “that is to say” without writing it, by “apposing” a second word with a case-ending to the first word with the same case-ending. This construction conduces to brevity and force, but sometimes to obscurity....In most of the instances the writer places at or near the end of a sentence some word or clause introduced without any preparatory or connecting word.... “But when the Paraclete shall have come -- *the Spirit of truth*.” Emphasis is laid on the Paraclete, or Advocate, as not being one of the ordinary kind -- the kind that takes up a client’s cause, good or bad, and makes the best of it -- but being “holy,” and a “*Spirit of truth*.”²⁷

The *Spirit of truth*, then, is an important expansion on the meaning of the noun *Paraclete* that is introduced in the first phrase of this verse. In effect, this allows us to put an “equals” sign between Paraclete and Spirit, so that when Paraclete is seen elsewhere in the Gospel of John it will be clear that Jesus is referring to the Holy Spirit. In this regard, Erickson says, “Jesus identifies the Counselor as the Holy Spirit. Thus, when he mentions the Counselor elsewhere, it

²⁴ Lange, 468.

²⁵ Godet, 304.

²⁶ Bernard, 499.

²⁷ Edwin A. Abbott, *Johannine Grammar*, (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1906), 37, 38, 40.

is clear to whom he is referring.”²⁸ This phrase also allows us to impute the specific characteristic of “truth” to the Spirit/Paraclete, and the importance of this characteristic will be discussed in more detail in a subsequent section.

“Who proceeds from the Father”

A very interesting feature of this phrase is the tense of the verb *to proceed*. This present deponent middle indicative verb is sandwiched between, on the one side, the undetermined future time implied by ελθη along with the future active indicative of πεμψω, and on the other side, by the future active indicative of μαρτυρησει. An exegesis of this passage must somehow account for this interesting change of tense. Godet states the point in the following words:

It must be observed that the second verb differs entirely from the first; *ekporeuesthai, to proceed from*, as a river from its source, is altogether different from *to be sent*: the *ek, out from*, which is added here to *para, from the presence of*, also marks a difference. But especially does the change of tense indicate the difference of idea: *whom I will send AND who proceeds from*. He whom Jesus will send (historically, at a given moment) is a divine being, who emanates (essentially, eternally) from the Father. An impartial exegesis cannot, as it seems to me, deny this sense.²⁹

Godet understands the change to the present tense to imply the eternal nature of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father. On the other hand, there are some that characterize the tense of this verb as a “futuristic” present tense:

Although εκπορευεται could imply either an emanation from a divine source or a procession on a mission, only εκ του πατρος would be appropriate to denote an eternal procession from the being of the Father, as the creeds testify, which read το εκ του πατρος εκπορευομενον....Following πεμψω and preceding μαρτυρεσει, the verb εκπορευεται should probably be taken as a futuristic (not a timeless) present.³⁰

In contrast to this, Hendriksen explains why the procession should be viewed as a timeless present: “The procession was taking place at the very moment when Jesus was speaking (if matters which in reality transcend time may be viewed from the aspect of time); hence, the present tense is used. Not improperly in such a connection this present tense has been called timeless present.”³¹

Most of the controversy regarding the application of John 15:26 to the Trinity, and especially concerning the place of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity, centers around this phrase. What does this verse teach concerning the relationships within the Godhead? Is the earlier *sending* to be equated with the *proceeding* here, or is something different implied by the *proceeding*? Does the present tense of *proceeds* indicate something of the eternal relationship

²⁸ Millard J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), 206.

²⁹ Godet, 305.

³⁰ Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology: Vol 3*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1971), 1203.

³¹ Hendriksen, 317.

between the Father and the Spirit (the Ontological Trinity), or is this a simple statement of the fact that the Spirit is coming to do His work in the world (the Economical Trinity)? How is the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit to be defined, and how is this doctrine stated in the orthodox creeds of the Christian faith? These are some of the interpretive questions and theological issues that must be addressed in this specific section.

One commentator sees an important truth that should not be overlooked when wrestling with all of the questions regarding this passage. Pink describes how these statements express the unity of the Godhead:

That the Spirit is here said to “proceed from the Father” (a statement which has split the Greek and Roman Church, into whose differences we shall not here enter) is supplementary to what the Lord had said in 14:26. There the Comforter was to be sent in Christ’s name: here He proceeds from the Father. The two statements placed side by side, bring out the unity of the Godhead. This additional word also shows that the Spirit was not exclusively subordinate to Christ, as some have argued from 14:26, “another Comforter.” The Spirit would further Christ’s interests, and be unto the disciples (only in another way) all that Christ would have been unto them had He remained on earth.³²

This is an important reminder that, whatever the implications of “proceeds from the Father,” the unity of the Godhead must hold a central place in our thinking.

Sending vs. Proceeding: Parallelism or Pleonasm?

One interpretation of the *sending* (“whom I will send”) and the *proceeding* (“who proceeds”) is that these two phrases were intended as parallel thoughts that represent the same concept. This position is taken by Beasley-Murray in his analysis of John 15:26.

The clauses relating to the Paraclete, “whom I will send from the Father,” and “who proceeds from the Father,” are set in synonymous parallelism, and so express the same idea in variation. This means that the latter clause must be interpreted of the sending of the Spirit on mission to humankind, and not of the so-called “procession” of the Spirit from the Father, as many Greek Fathers maintained, and as is represented in the historic creeds. The sending of the Spirit in many respects corresponds to the sending of the Son (cf. 8:42; 13:3; 17:8). The Spirit’s task is to “bear witness” concerning Jesus (περι εμου).³³

Beasley-Murray demonstrates that if these phrases constitute synonymous parallelism, then it is an easy step to restrict their application only to the economical work of the Spirit. If these ideas are synonymous, then the procession must be interpreted in light of the sending of the Spirit to do the practical work of witnessing to the disciples and the world.

Synonymous parallelism is a commonly held view, but it is a view that is not without problems, as Godet explains: “The attempt is made to escape the charge of tautology by saying

³² Arthur W. Pink, Exposition of the Gospel of John: Vol III, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1945), 37.

³³ George R. Beasley-Murray, Word Biblical Commentary (Vol 36): John, (Waco: Word Publishing, 1987), 276.

that the first clause indicates the relation of the Spirit to Christ, and the second His relation to God (Keil); as if in the latter were not already contained the *from God*, which repeated in the second clause, would form the most idle pleonasm.”³⁴ Synonymous parallelism has both the flaws of logical and grammatical redundancy. Godet goes on to explain:

The historical facts of salvation, to the view of Jesus, rest upon eternal relations, as well with reference to Himself, the Son, as to the Spirit. They are, as it were, the reflections of the Trinitarian relations. As the incarnation of the Son rests upon His eternal generation, so the mission of the Holy Spirit is related to His eternal procession from the very centre of the divine being. The context is not in the least contradictory to this sense, as Weiss thinks; on the contrary, it demands it. What Jesus sends testifies truly for Him only so far as it comes forth from God.³⁵

Godet’s argument is that these phrases do not express parallel or synonymous thoughts but that something additional is being communicated about the Spirit, especially regarding His ontological relationship to the Father. Godet would say that this additional idea is essential to the work of the Spirit, because the eternal relations in the Godhead are the foundation for His work in the world. There are essentially two views or interpretations of John 15:26 regarding the Spirit: the Economical Trinity view and the Ontological Trinity view.

Economical Trinity View

The Economical Trinity view maintains that this verse was never intended to make a statement about the eternal relations in the Godhead, but only about the coming, the sending, or the proceeding of the Spirit (variously stated) to continue the work of Christ in the world. One account of this view is provided by Brodie, who bases his argument on the increasingly active role of the Spirit in the Gospel of John:

The sense of the Spirit’s involvement is heightened by the fact that, in contrast to the two earlier references to the Companion (14:16, 26), the picture of the Companion which is suggested here is quite active. These earlier references (esp. 14:16) had spoken of the Companion in a way that was rather passive, as one who was given and sent. But now (15:26) the Companion is described not only as being sent but also as “coming,” and then, in a parallel phrase which puts intensified emphasis on the idea of an active role, the Companion is described simply as “proceeding” (“the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father”). The emphasis of the text then is not so much on the inner dynamics of God as on the increasing role of the Companion in the outer world, a role which consists of witnessing about Jesus.³⁶

Another statement of this view is given by Bernard, whose argument is based on the meaning of *εκπορευεσθαι* as being synonymous with the *coming* and the *sending*:

³⁴ Godet, 304-305.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 305.

³⁶ Thomas L. Brodie, *The Gospel According to John*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 490.

εκπορευεσθαι occurs once elsewhere in John, see at 5:29, where it is used of the dead “coming forth” out of their graves. Here it is used in the same way of the Spirit “coming forth” from God in His mission of witness. To interpret the phrase of what is called “the Eternal Procession” of the Spirit has been a habit of theologians, which has been the cause of endless disputes between East and West as to the “Procession” of the Spirit from the Son as well as from the Father. As far back as the fourth century, at all events, the clause το εκ (not παρα) του πατρος εκπορευομενον has found a place in the Creed as descriptive of the Holy Spirit, and is taken from the verse before us. But to claim that this interpretation was present to the mind of John would be to import into the Gospel the controversies and doctrines of the fourth century. ‘ο παρα του πατρος εκπορευεται does not refer to the mysterious relationships between the Persons of the Holy Trinity, but only to the fact that the Spirit who bears witness of Jesus Christ has come from God (cf. Rev 22:1, where in like manner the river of the water of life is described as εκπορευομενον εκ του τηρονου του τηρου).³⁷

In addition, Ryrie reminds us of the change of tense from future to present in the context of John 15:26, and he believes that it is inappropriate to infer eternal relations from this tense change: “The idea of eternal procession has to lean hard on the present tense of the word *proceeds* in John 15:26, an emphasis which is in my judgment misplaced. The verse does not really seem to relate anything about the mutual eternal relationships within the Trinity but rather what the Spirit would do to continue the work of the Lord Jesus after His ascension.”³⁸ Another advocate of the Economical Trinity view is Morris, who bases his argument primarily on the use of the word παρα rather than εκ following the verb:

The Spirit’s relationship to the Father is brought out by saying that He “proceedeth from the Father.” After εκπορευεται we would expect the preposition εκ rather than παρα. Wescott thinks that “The use of παρα in this place seems...to show decisively that the reference here is to the temporal mission of the Holy Spirit, and not to the eternal Procession.” He points out that the Creeds which refer to the latter doctrine uniformly use εκ, and that the Greek Fathers who use the present passage to support the doctrine of the Procession change the παρα to εκ. Probably not too much emphasis should be placed on the meaning of this verb. The passage is not concerned with the eternal mutual relationships of the Persons of the Trinity, but with the work the Spirit would do in this world as a continuation of the ministry of Jesus. The particular function of the Spirit which occupies us here is that of witness, and specifically of witness to Christ. When Christ is taken from the earth, the Spirit will continually bear witness concerning Him. The passage strengthens the conviction that the word translated “Comforter” has legal significance. The Spirit, so to speak, conducts Christ’s case for Him before the world.³⁹

³⁷ Bernard, 499.

³⁸ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987), 54-55.

³⁹ Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 683-684.

In another place Morris also expresses the Economical Trinity view. He warns interpreters not to misapply the verse by stretching it to cover more than a close relationship between the Father and the Holy Spirit: “Jesus is clearly speaking about the Holy Spirit’s mission in the church (I will send...), whereas the theologians were referring to the eternal relationship between the Father and the Spirit. It was not really wise to take words that apply to one temporal activity of the Spirit and apply them to an eternal relationship. But the words certainly emphasize the close relationship between the Father and the Spirit, and that is important.”⁴⁰ Morris’ warning not to take words that apply to one temporal activity of the Spirit and apply them to an eternal relationship is valid if, in fact, the words were only meant to apply to a temporal activity. If the words were meant to tell us something of the eternal relationship between the Father and the Spirit, then it would be incorrect not to apply them to that eternal relationship. In summary, the Economical Trinity view seems to be based primarily on the “synonymous parallelism” interpretation of *whom I will send* and *who proceeds from the Father*. However, this view does not adequately account for the change to present tense for the word *proceeds*, but rather minimizes its significance.

The Ontological Trinity View

The Ontological Trinity view holds to the eternal procession of the Spirit from the Father, which ultimately provides the foundation for the economical work of the Spirit in the world. Hendriksen expresses this view, basing his argument on the tense change of the verb:

Here in 15:26 the emphasis is on the activity of the Son in the sending of the Spirit, and on the fact that this Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father...The procession was taking place at the very moment when Jesus was speaking (if matters which in reality transcend time may be viewed from the aspect of time); hence, the present tense is used. Not improperly in such a connection this present tense has been called timeless present. The inter-trinitarian relationship which is indicated here - the procession of the Spirit - is eternal, that is, transcends time.⁴¹

In this regard, Cook shows how the Economical Trinity and Ontological Trinity are both referenced according to the tense of the verb: “In contrast to the $\pi\epsilon\mu\psi\omega$, which refers to an act, $\epsilon\kappa\pi\omicron\rho\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$ (proceeds) is a present tense and may well refer to an eternal relationship (understanding this as a timeless present). If this be so, the two future verbs of the verse refer to the Spirit’s economical relationship to the Godhead, while the present verb refers to His ontological relationship.”⁴² Lange also represents this view and takes same the approach outlined by Godet that to view the *procession* as synonymous with the *sending* would form an unreasonable tautology. He states that the economical or soteriological work of the Spirit must have an ontological or theological basis.

⁴⁰ Morris, *Expository Reflections*, 533-4.

⁴¹ Hendriksen, 317.

⁴² Robert W. Cook, *The Theology of John*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 64.

The noun εκπορευσις, *processio*, nowhere occurs in the New Testament, and belongs to the ecclesiastical language, but it is legitimately formed from the verb εκπορευομαι, which is here (and here alone) used of the Holy Ghost, and denotes the characteristic individuality of the person (not the essence, which is the same in all Persons) of the Holy Spirit, as Sonship or eternal generation is the propriety of the Son, unbegotten paternity the propriety of the Father. The Nicene orthodoxy refers the procession of the Spirit to the eternal, metaphysical procession from the Father. Christ speaks here no doubt mainly of the Trinity of revelation and of the historic mission of the Holy Ghost in the Christian Church and in believers. Yet it is significant that while He speaks of His sending of the Spirit in the future tense (πεμψω), He speaks of the procession of the Spirit from the Father in the present (εκπορευεται), as if He intended to intimate a permanent relation of the Spirit to the Father. The effusion of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost is the historic manifestation of His eternal procession from the Father, and bears a similar relation to the latter as the incarnation of Christ does to the eternal generation. At all events we have a right to deduce the economical Trinity from the ontological or immanent Trinity; the former is the revelation of the latter; for God manifests Himself as He is.⁴³

In summary, the Ontological Trinity view adequately accounts for the change in tense of the verb *proceeds*. It also overcomes the charge of tautology in the synonymous parallelism approach and explains the difference in meaning between the phrases *whom I will send* and *who proceeds from the Father*. This view also fits the context of the verse regarding the witnessing work of the Spirit in the world, but it goes further by showing how the eternal relationships within the Godhead provide the foundation or basis for the work of the Spirit in the world.

The Doctrine of the Procession of the Holy Spirit

As Bernard has stated, the doctrine of the procession of the Spirit is taken from the verse before us (John 15:26). Walvoord defines this doctrine in the following words: "The doctrine of procession has to do with the being and eternity of the Holy Spirit in His relation to the Father and the Son. As a division of the doctrine of the Trinity, it affirms that the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity, the same in substance and essence, and equal in power, eternity, and glory. The proper statement of the doctrine is that the Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son."⁴⁴

The concept of procession cannot be easily explained, but it is a term that has been used to describe the internal relationship of the Spirit within the Godhead. Even if the term is difficult to define, it is also difficult to find a better term to describe the Spirit's relationship. This is pointed out by Walvoord:

The wide acceptance of the doctrine by theologians and church creeds is caused by specific Scriptural testimony to it. While in its precise nature the character of the

⁴³ Lange, 469.

⁴⁴ John F. Walvoord, The Holy Spirit, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), 13.

procession is inscrutable, it provides a definition of the relationship of the persons of the Trinity. Important Scripture texts such as John 15:26 and Psalm 104:30 have been accepted as explicit proof. In John 15:26, the Comforter whom Christ promised to send is referred to as, “the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father.” The word for “proceedeth” (*ekporeuetai*) is in the present tense in the original, which has been accepted without much opposition as indicating the eternal and continuous relation of the Spirit to the First Person....Among the several conclusions which form a part of the doctrine of procession is the fact that the procession of the Holy Spirit is eternal. The very nature of procession points to its eternity. Procession like the eternal generation of Christ is not a matter of creation, commencement of existence, or analogous in any way to physical relationships common in the human realm. It proceeds rather from the very nature of the Godhead, being necessary to its existence. Without the Holy Spirit, the Godhead would not be what it is. The procession of the Holy Spirit cannot be compared to the incarnation, as the incarnation was not essential to deity....In speaking of the Son, the Scriptures affirm His generation eternally (Ps. 2:7), while in speaking of the Spirit, the word *proceed* is used, as we have seen. No human mind can improve on these distinctions, even if it be admitted that the terms are inadequate to comprehend all the truth which they represent.⁴⁵

Historically, much of the controversy about the doctrine of procession involved the question of whether the Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as from the Father. The earlier church creeds, particularly those of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381), did not explicitly state the procession from the Son. At the Council of Toledo (589), where only the western church was represented, the phrase *filioque* (“and the Son”) was added, and this brought opposition from the eastern church which argued that John 15:26 only included procession from the Father. The Greek church was right to assert this, but the task of systematic theology involves correlating all of the Scriptural evidence concerning a particular doctrine. This is exactly what the Roman church did in attributing the procession to the Son also. Regarding the church creeds that were intended to affirm the deity of the Holy Spirit, Lange remarks, “The original Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed affirms the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father not with an exclusive intent, but rather in opposition to the Pneumatomachi.”⁴⁶ The statements of the earlier creeds, then, were not intended to completely define the relationship of the Spirit to the Father and the Son, but were primarily intended to defend the deity of the Spirit. Hendriksen provides an excellent analysis of the issue of the procession of the Spirit:

Were we to say, “The fact that 15:26 states that the Son will send the Spirit proves that the Father does not send him,” we would be wrong (see 14:26). Thus also, were we to say, “The fact that 15:26 states that the Spirit proceeds from the Father proves that he does not proceed from the Son,” we would be wrong (see Acts 5:9; Rom 8:9; 2 Cor 3:17; Gal 4:6; Phil 1:19; 1 Pet 1:11; where the Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ). After all, is

⁴⁵ Ibid., 14-15.

⁴⁶ Lange, 469.

it so strange that Jesus speaking as Mediator between God and man, himself man, would during the period of humiliation speak of the Spirit as proceeding from the Father?⁴⁷

We must remember that it is the incarnate Christ who made the statement regarding the procession of the Spirit from the Father in John 15:26. Knox explains this important idea in the following words: "If our Lord had said 'who proceeds from the Father and from me,' He would have been speaking as God, without reference to His incarnate state, which was not His habit. The Holy Spirit does not proceed from the incarnate Christ as such."⁴⁸ During His earthly life it was Jesus' practice to attribute things such as this to the working out of the Father's will and plan. If Jesus were to have made this statement at some time after He had returned to the Father's side, it would probably have been worded differently. Walvoord provides a helpful concluding statement regarding the doctrine of the procession of the Spirit:

While the doctrine of procession may seem somewhat of a technicality except to theologians, it has a vital bearing upon the work of the Holy Spirit as revealed in the Scriptures. In the case of Christ, His eternal generation involved the work of the Son which was accomplished in time, fulfilling the purpose of redemption. As Christ became an obedient Son in doing the Father's will, so the Holy Spirit in procession became obedient to the Father and the Son. This subordination without detracting from the eternal glory and divine attributes which characterized all three Persons is taught specifically in the Scriptures (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The ministry of the Third Person is performed in His own power and gives testimony to His eternal deity and glory, but it is accomplished on behalf of the Father and the Son. Hence, the Spirit is sent into the world to reveal truth on behalf of Christ (John 16:13-15), with the special mission of making the things of Christ known and magnifying the Father and the Son. He is not seeking His own glory any more than the Son sought His own glory while in the period of humiliation.... While the nature of procession is largely inscrutable, it is an expression in human words based on the Scriptural revelation of the relationship of the persons of the Trinity to each other.⁴⁹

"He will testify concerning me"

One of the questions this section must address is whether the personality or personhood of the Spirit is implied by this phrase. Regarding the emphatic position of the demonstrative pronoun "He" in this phrase, Bernard states that "*ekeinos* calls special attention to the Spirit as the subject of the sentence, exactly as at 14:26. It is He, and none less than He, who shall bear august and true witness to the world about Christ."⁵⁰ Godet agrees when he gives the meaning as "He, that Being, and He alone."⁵¹

⁴⁷ Hendriksen, 317.

⁴⁸ R. A. Knox, as quoted in Randolph V. G. Tasker, The Gospel According to St. John, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960), 180.

⁴⁹ Walvoord, 16.

⁵⁰ Bernard, 499.

⁵¹ Godet, 305.

One of the questions that arises is, “Does the use of the masculine *ekeinos* denote the personality of the Spirit?” It is important to understand the grammatical implications of the use of this masculine pronoun in reference to the Spirit. Newman and Nida have stated, “Whereas in 14:26 the pronoun referring to the Spirit is neuter, here a masculine pronoun is used, indicating that the Spirit is thought of in personal terms.”⁵² Barrett also believes that the use of the masculine gender clearly implies the personality of the Spirit: “The gender changes; the occurrence in the previous clause of the neuter relative ‘ο shows that this is not simply a matter of grammatical agreement with *παρακλατος*; the Spirit is thought of in personal terms.”⁵³

Taking a neutral position, Morris believes that although the use of the masculine *ekeinos* does not explicitly prove the personality of the Spirit, it does imply that the Spirit is perceived in a personal way: “The masculine *εκεινος* is noteworthy, for *το πνευμα* is nearer than is *παρακλατος*. It does not prove that the Spirit is personal, but it is an indication that John tended to think of the Spirit in personal terms. This, of course, accords also with the function ascribed to him here, that of bearing witness, for this is normally a personal activity.”⁵⁴

Others believe that the masculine *ekeinos* in no sense denotes the personality of the Spirit, but is simply required by the masculine antecedent of the pronoun. As previously illustrated in the sentence diagram, it appears that the logical antecedent of *ekeinos* is the masculine noun *paraklatos*. Cook states, “It is true that the demonstrative pronoun *ekeinos* (that person, or He) is used throughout these passages in the masculine gender, but its antecedent is not *pneuma* but *paraklaton* (Helper).”⁵⁵ Wallace’s comments clearly explain this view:

The use of *εκεινος* here is frequently regarded by students of the NT to be an affirmation of the personality of the Spirit. Such an approach is based on the assumption that the antecedent of *εκεινος* is *πνευμα*....but this is erroneous. In all these Johannine passages, *πνευμα* is appositional to a masculine noun. The gender of *εκεινος* thus has nothing to do with the natural gender of *πνευμα*. The antecedent of *εκεινος*, in each case, is *παρακλατος*, not *πνευμα*....Thus, since *παρακλατος* is masculine, so is the pronoun. Although one might argue that the Spirit’s personality is in view in these passages, the view must be based on the nature of a *παρακλατος* and the things said about the Comforter, not on any supposed grammatical subtleties.⁵⁶

In light of this, the nature and work of the Spirit must be examined for the evidence of His personality. Bernard states that since we do not know how the early church understood the idea of personality we cannot say for certain that this is implied, but the verse does show that the Spirit was more than an impersonal force. “However little modern conceptions of personality and of what it implies were present to the mind of the first century, the repeated application of

⁵² Newman and Nida, 497.

⁵³ C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), 482.

⁵⁴ Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 683.

⁵⁵ Cook, 62.

⁵⁶ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 331-332.

εκεινος to the Spirit in these chapters (16:8, 13, 14; 14:26) shows that for John το πνευμα της αληθειας meant more than a mere tendency or influence.⁵⁷ Lange comments that, "His testimony is personal, and distinguished from the personal testimony of the disciples."⁵⁸ Van Doren also adds, "He is sent, and cometh, and witnesseth, which things are proper to a person only. His witness concerning the Son is the witness of the Father Himself."⁵⁹ Swete also gives an extremely personal description of the work of the Spirit in John 15:26.

The Incarnate will not leave Himself without witness in the world. The testimony of His words and works, which the world has rejected, will after His departure be carried forward by other witnesses. First and chief among these will be the coming Paraclete, who, as the Spirit of Truth, cannot but bear witness to the Truth. Hitherto the Lord has spoken of the other Paraclete only as the Teacher of the Church; He cannot teach the world while it continues to be such, for the world is not susceptible of spiritual teaching. But the Spirit may bear witness where He cannot teach as yet; and this He will do. The world had succeeded in silencing the voice of Jesus, and another generation might easily forget His teaching. But the Witness who was coming would not let the world forget, and no opposition could altogether silence Him.⁶⁰

Hendriksen expresses a similar thought as he describes the very personal impact that the Spirit would have in transforming the lives of individuals such as the persecutor Saul into passionate missionaries for Christ:

The Holy Spirit is here called the Spirit of truth, just as in 14:17. That Spirit will testify (see 1:7, 8). In the midst of the wicked world he will testify against the world (16:8, 9). In the midst of mankind he will bear witness concerning mankind's need. In the midst of the Church he will comfort the Church. The sphere of his testimony must not be restricted. Whenever a true servant of God bears witness against the world, this witness is the work of the Spirit. Whenever a simple believer, by word and example, draws others to Christ, this too is the work of the Spirit. That Spirit always testifies in connection with the Word, the Word of Christ (14:26; 16:14, 15). By and large, the world that is openly hostile to Christ will not receive him (14:17). Nevertheless, there are exceptions. From among those who today are openly hostile some will be drawn. They will be transferred from the kingdom of darkness to that of everlasting light. Was there ever a fiercer persecutor than Saul (or Paul) of Tarsus? The Spirit was going to change him (and others like him) to become a zealous missionary for Christ!⁶¹

Beyond any specific grammatical evidence, then, the personality of the Spirit can be clearly seen in His character and in His activities.

⁵⁷ Bernard, 500.

⁵⁸ Lange, 469.

⁵⁹ Van Doren, 1157.

⁶⁰ Henry B. Swete, *The Last Discourse and Prayer of Our Lord: A Study of St. John XIV.-XVII*, (London: Macmillan and Company, 1913), 105-106.

⁶¹ Hendriksen, 317-318.

“And you also must testify because you have been with Me from the beginning”

One of the prevalent features of John 15:26-27 is the emphatic use of pronouns to call attention to the activity of the ones to whom they refer. Regarding the phrase currently under consideration, Burge comments, “*You* is emphatic in Greek here, underscoring that we are not permitted a passive role. The disciples are witnesses and the Spirit will bear witness; the disciples possess the historical record of Jesus’ words and work (*you have been with me from the beginning*, 15:27b), and they now will be empowered as they deliver that message to the world.”⁶² On a similar note Godet remarks, “The *καὶ υμεῖς* signifies therefore: ‘And you also, *you* will have your special part in this testimony’...and the more, since the particle *καὶ δε* indicates a marked graduation (cf. vi. 51)”⁶³ It is clear that an intimate partnership is intended between the disciples and the Holy Spirit to bring the message of Jesus to the world.

Beasley-Murray describes the close working relationship that is to exist between the human witnesses and the heavenly Witness in the following words:

The witness of the Spirit, conjoined with that of the disciples, is to bring to light the truth of the revelation of Jesus in his word and deed, and death and resurrection. Clearly this witness of the Paraclete is not a phenomenon apart from that of the disciples, but inseparably associated with it. The Spirit thus illuminates the hearers’ minds as to the reality of that which is proclaimed by the disciples and brings its truth to bear on their consciences (cf. 16:8-11)...The disciples will be capable of doing this because they have accompanied Jesus “from the beginning,” i.e., from the outset of the ministry of Jesus to its close.⁶⁴

Bernard explains that “the qualification for ‘witness’ is personal intimacy, ‘*ὅτι ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἔστε*: cf. Lk. 1:2, Acts 1:21. ‘Ye are with me from the beginning,’ Jesus said, using the present tense here. The Twelve had been chosen, and they continued to be in close fellowship with Him.”⁶⁵ This close association with Christ was the basis for their authority. “The authority of the apostles lay chiefly in the fact that they had been with Jesus some three years and remembered his words and deeds. This human or natural authority of an eyewitness was tremendously enforced and amplified by the incursion of the Holy Spirit which revived their memory (14:26), clarified the Scriptures (Acts 2:17-31) and enabled them to press home their relevance with telling effect (Acts 2:36; 3:25, 26; 4:10-12).”⁶⁶

Godet provides a remarkable summary of the partnership that is designed for the disciples and the Holy Spirit to bring the message of Jesus to the world:

The apostles possess a treasure which is peculiar to them, and which the Spirit could not communicate to them -- the historical knowledge of the ministry of Jesus from its beginning to its end. The Spirit does not teach the facts of history; He reveals their

⁶² Burge, 421.

⁶³ Godet, 306, 305.

⁶⁴ Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 277.

⁶⁵ Bernard, 500.

⁶⁶ Turner and Mantey, 310.

meaning. But this historical testimony of the apostles would, without the Spirit, be only a frigid narrative incapable of creating life. It is the Spirit which brings the vivifying breath to the testimony. By making the light of the divine thought fall upon the facts, He makes them a power which lays hold upon souls. Without the facts, the Spirit would be only an empty exaltation devoid of contents, of substance; without the Spirit the narrative of the facts would remain dead and unfruitful. The apostolic testimony and the testimony of the Spirit unite, therefore, in one and the same act, but they do so while bringing to it, each of them, a necessary element, the one, the historical narration, the other, the inward evidence. This relation is still reproduced at the present day in every living sermon drawn from the Scriptures. Peter, in like manner, distinguishes these two testimonies in Acts v. 32: "And we are witnesses of these things, as well as the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him." We understand, after this, why, when the apostles wished to fill the place of Judas, they chose two men who had accompanied Jesus from the baptism of John even to His resurrection (Acts i. 21,22).⁶⁷

Interpretive Conclusions Regarding the Trinity

Based on this study of John 15:26-27, several conclusions regarding the doctrine of the Trinity can be stated. Of the theological concepts that must be included in any orthodox definition of the Trinity, several points of support can be gained from this passage.

Regarding the unity of the Godhead, a comparison of the larger context demonstrates that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all expressing a unified will and they are all intimately involved in accomplishing a unified purpose. Also, as Morris has stated regarding the sending of the Spirit, "We ought not to think of division or compartmentalization within the Godhead."⁶⁸ It is clear that the unity of the Godhead is being expressed here.

Regarding the distinction of the three members of the Godhead, this passage clearly identifies all three members and distinctly references the roles of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Cook affirms, "The Holy Spirit is a distinct member of the Godhead. The Holy Spirit is not merely another manifestation of Christ (John 14:26; 15:26)...The relation of the Holy Spirit to the Father and Son is especially noteworthy in John 15:26."⁶⁹

Regarding the personality of the members of the Godhead, this passage clearly portrays the work of the Spirit as the work of a person rather than that of an impersonal force. The use of $\pi\epsilon\mu\psi\omega$, which refers to sending beings of a personal character, and the choice of the masculine $\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\kappa\lambda\eta\tau\omicron\varsigma$ to stand in apposition to the neuter $\pi\nu\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha$, lends further support to the personality of the Holy Spirit.

Regarding the deity of the persons of the Godhead, here the Spirit is designated as the Spirit of truth just as Jesus earlier says of Himself that He is truth. In addition, the doctrine of the procession of the Spirit clearly affirms His deity as the third Person of the Godhead who is identical in essence, power, and glory to the Father and the Son.

⁶⁷ Godet, 305-306.

⁶⁸ Morris, Expository Reflections, 533.

⁶⁹ Cook, 64.

Regarding the eternality of the persons of the Godhead, the doctrine of the procession of the Spirit establishes His eternality, based on the Ontological Trinity view of the phrase “*who proceeds from the Father.*”

Regarding the existence of functional subordination within the Godhead, the Spirit is clearly portrayed as submitting to Christ’s sending Him into the world. Erickson provides a detailed explanation of the relationships within the Godhead:

Here something of the inner relationships within the Trinity is revealed....In 15:26 he refers to “the Counselor...whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.” In 16:7 he says, “It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.” Not only does Jesus say that the Father will send the Spirit, but that he also will send the Spirit. The Spirit whom Jesus sends goes out from the Father. The Father sends the Spirit in Jesus’ name. Jesus sends the Spirit, who goes out from the Father. The Spirit will testify about Jesus and will remind them of everything Jesus has said to them. Jesus also says that the Spirit will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears (16:13). Yet Jesus’ words of which presumably the Spirit will remind them are not his own words. Rather, they belong to the Father who sent him (14:24). Conversely, however, everything that belongs to the Father is his (16:15). When looked at in light of these several considerations, John seems to be affirming or at least assuming or implying a number of tenets. The sending of the Spirit is by both the Father and the Son, or at least can be described in either of these fashions. Even when referred to as the agency of one of these persons, there is reference or at least allusion to the other. There evidently is a close relationship between the actions of the Father and the Son, and presumably also between them as persons. Further, the ministry of the Spirit is not independent of the other persons. It involves bringing to remembrance the teaching that Jesus has given. Yet in a sense these are not just Jesus’ words, for he has received them from the Father. And one may deduce that this is why both the Father and the Son will make their home with the one who obeys these teachings, for they are the teachings of both the Father and Son. It is notable that the Spirit also will be in the believers (14:17), and it may be inferred that this is because the teachings that they obey are also his as the end point of the transmission process. Further, the designation of the Spirit as “another (*αλλος* -- another of the same kind) Counselor” (14:16) suggests a commonality of ministry of the Spirit and of the Son. This also is implied in the fact that the Spirit can come to begin his ministry in the fullest sense only if and when the Son goes away (16:7).⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Erickson, God in Three Persons, 206-207.

Conclusion

John 15:26-27 provides many valuable pieces of Scriptural evidence supporting the doctrine of the Trinity. This data includes an emphasis on the unity of the Godhead; the distinctiveness of the three members of the Trinity; the functional subordination of the members of the Godhead; and especially the personality, deity, and eternality of the Holy Spirit. John 15:26-27 substantiates many of the essential concepts that must be considered when constructing an orthodox definition of the doctrine of the Trinity.