

Plurality in Unity

How are we to function as the God planned and ordained Church – the “called out ones” – who are His representatives in this world? How do we go about fulfilling our part in His eternal plan?

Well a good starting point would be to attempt to gain some understanding of the nature, function, order and operation of the Persons in the Godhead. Who they are; how they relate to one another; and their relevant functions in terms of the eternal plan of God.

Acts 17:28 ... *“for in Him we live and move and have our being” ... “we are His offspring” ...*

1 Jn 4:17 ... *“As He is so are we in this world” ...*

2 Cor 5:20 ... *“we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us” ...*

So let us try to gain an understanding of the nature, function, order and operation of our God, which will help us as we cooperate with Him in our journey here as His representatives.

Triune God

Right from the first verse, and throughout the Old Testament, we find that there is a **plural** form used for the name of God, and **plural** personal pronouns that are used to refer to Him.

Gen 1:1 ... *“In the beginning **God** created the heavens and the earth”.*

The term use here (and in thousands of other places in the scriptures) for “God” is *Elohim* (‘ēlōhîm). This word *Elohim* is the *plural* form of the word *Eloah* (‘ēlōah) (*singular*) derived from the root word *El* (*singular*). *Elohim* (plural) represents the plurality of persons in the Trinity of the Godhead.

Some people try and explain away this plurality by saying it is a “plural of majesty,” but there are many scripture verses which make it quite clear this name in its plural form is referring to the plurality of persons. We will consider just a few.

Gen 1:26 ... *“Then God (Elohim) said, “Let **Us** make man in **Our** image, according to **Our** likeness;”*

Note the use of the plural personal pronouns “us” and “our”.

Genesis 3:22 ... *“Then the LORD God(Jehovah Elohim) said, “Behold, the man has become like one of **Us**, knowing good and evil...”*

Then in Deuteronomy 6:4 (“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our **God**, the Lord is one!”), the very verse that declared God’s unity to all Jews, contains the plural name (*Elohim*) for God. Here we have **plurality in unity** – which without doubt must be an intimation of the Trinity.

So we have one God but three Persons – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. How can that be? How does this work? Plurality in unity? Well, it may help if we consider three words:

Equality, Authority and Ministry

Equality:

God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are co-equally “God”. As God they are co-equal and co-eternal. None is more “God” than the others. They are co-equally God; they always have been and always will be. They are co-eternally God; Deut 33:27 ... “*The eternal God (Elohim) is a dwelling place*”.

Let us look at a few scriptures that verify their equality as God.

1. The Father is God:

1 Cor 8:6 ... “*there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things*”...

2 Thess 1:2 ... “*Grace to you and peace from God the Father*” ...

1 Pet 1:2 ... “*according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*” ...

2. The Son is God:

John 1:1, 14 ... “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.*”

Titus 2:13 ... “*looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Christ Jesus.*”

Heb 1:8 ... “*But of the Son He says, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever.*”

3. The Holy Spirit is God:

Gen 1:2 ... “*the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.*”

Acts 5:3-4 ... “*But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.”*

So in terms of “equality” there is no difference between the Three Persons of the Godhead – they are co-equally God. We can worship each one of them as God.

Authority:

There is a definite authority structure in our Triune God. Without this there would be chaos and disorder.

1. The Father – The ultimate and final authority is vested in the Father. He is above all.

Eph 4:6 ... “*one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.*”

1 Cor 11:3 ... “*But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God (the Father) is the head of Christ.*”

1 Cor 15:24-28 ... *“then comes the end, when He (the Son) hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He (the Son) has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For He (the Father) has put all things in subjection under His (the Son) feet. But when He says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is evident that He (the Father) is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him (the Son). When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One (the Father) who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.*

In all these passages it is clear that the Son submits to the Father because the Father is the highest authority figure. The Father is above all in terms of authority. He is the ultimate authority.

2. The Son – In terms of authority He is above all except the Father.

The passage in 1 Cor 15:24-28 that we have just read testifies of this fact, that the Son is above all authority except that of the Father. Other scriptures that confirm this are:

Matt 28:18 ... *“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”*

Col 1:16-17 ... *“For by Him (the Son) all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”*

3. The Holy Spirit – The third Person of the Trinity of the Godhead in terms of authority. He never magnifies Himself; He magnifies the Person and ministry of the Son.

John 15:26 ... *“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.”*

John 16:13-15 ... *“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.”*

So we see a clear authority structure and order in the Trinity – The Holy Spirit honours and exalts the Son; the Son honours and exalts the Father, in whom the final authority rests.

Ministry:

Each Person in the Godhead has a distinct and different ministry function:

1. The Ministry of the Father

First and foremost He is Father. He is the Father of a family who He has birthed (the “born again”) who share His life. He is loving, faithful, compassionate, gracious, caring, provider and protector.

2 Cor 1:3-4 ... *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to*

comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

He is the ultimate source of Life and gives that life through His Son

John 5:26 ... *“For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself.”*

John 3:16 ... *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”*

He is the one who is the architect of the divine plan and purpose for all things. His sovereign will rules supreme.

Isa 46:10 ... *“Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure’.”*

Much of the Father’s ministry is summed up in a few of passages in which we see that He is the **Great Planner**, with a purpose and a will that was established in eternity past, which He is overseeing to bring it to pass. He plans and provides the means that His will may be brought to fruition:

Eph 1:3-6 ... *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who has blessed us** with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as **He chose us** in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love **He predestined us** to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of **His will**, to the praise of the glory of **His grace**, which **He freely bestowed on us** in the Beloved.”*

Rom 8:28-30 ... *“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to **His purpose**. For those whom He **foreknew**, He also **predestined** to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom **He predestined, He also called**; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.”*

He is the great Authoriser – He gives authority

Matt 28:18 ... *“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”*

The Father’s ministry as loving Father, life giver and Sovereign ruler over all is **to plan** and to oversee His **eternal plan** making **provision** for its fulfilment.

2. The Ministry of the Son

Right from before God created the world the Father had a plan for us, that we would live by the life of His Son and thereby live holy and blameless lives (Eph 1:4). So He made the provision through His Son.

The ministry of the Son is to redeem us from sin, to reconcile us to the Father, give us eternal life, so that He can live in and be seen and heard through us. He gave His life so that we could have it and live by it.

He has a redemptive ministry:

Eph 1:7 ... *"In Him (The Son) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace."*

The Son, Christ, came to give us life; His is the life that has been birthed in us; He lives in us and wants to be seen and heard through us:

1 Pet 1:23 ... *"for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God."*

John 10:10 ... *"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."*

1 John 5:11-12 ... *"And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life."*

This is His ongoing function and ministry – to be the life in us and to minister through us. That's why we, like Paul, can say:

Gal 2:20 ... *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."*

Col 1:27 ... *"Christ in you, the hope of glory."*

He is alive in us and we live by His life and by His faith. His ministry was to come to earth to live as a man and show us how man with the divine nature is to live; then He died and rose again so that He could make a way for us to be partakers of His divine nature – to live by His life a holy, blameless, righteous life and to share that life with others.

Christ, the Son, associates us with Him in His ongoing ministry of carrying out the works the Father has assigned for Him to do. He comes to live in us and work through us.

Matt 5:14 ... *"You are the light of the world."*

John 14:12, 18 ... *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father... I will come to you."*

The Son functions as the Head of the body, the church:

Col 1:18 ... *"He is also head of the body, the church."*

He functions as our Shepherd, Advocate and High Priest:

John 10:14 ... *"I am the **good shepherd**, and I know My own and My own know Me."* (See Ps. 23)

1 John 2:1 ... *"if anyone sins, we have an **Advocate** with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."*

Heb 4:14-16 ... *"Therefore, since we have a **great high priest** who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a **high priest** who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*

He reigns as supreme conquering King of kings:

Rev 17:14 ... *"These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful."*

The ministry of the Son is vast and we have only touched on it, but now must move on to:

3. The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

The ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament compared to the New Testament differs in one main factor – in the Old He was "**upon**" or "**with**" (but not "in") certain individuals selected out by God for a specific reason (kings, prophets, leaders); in the New He is "**in**" all believers.

John 14:16-17 ... *"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides **with you** and will be **in you**."*

The Holy Spirit is the one who convicts sinners of sin, righteousness and judgement and draws us to Christ, to salvation:

John 16:7-11 ... *"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will **convict** the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged."*

He is the Spirit of Truth and is the author (inspirer) of the written Word of God – the Spirit and Word are therefore in absolute agreement:

1 Pet 1:20-21 ... *“that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”*

The prime function of the Holy Spirit towards believers is to reveal Christ who is in them, to them – to renew our minds that we may have the mind of Christ and let Him be seen in all our words and actions:

John 14:26 ... *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”*

John 16:13-14 ... *“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.”*

The Holy Spirit alone knows the will and mind of the Father and helps us to pray when we don’t have a clear understanding of how or what to pray:

1 Cor 2:11 ... *“For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.”*

Romans 8:26 ... *“In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”*

He brings to us revelation and knowledge concerning God:

Eph 1:17 ... *I pray ... “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.”*

He leads us and guides us in the will and way of the Father to bring us to maturity in Christ:

Rom 8:14 ... *“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”*

He appoints and sends out ministers of the gospel;

Acts 13:2, 4 ... *“While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them ... So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.”*

Finally, He will raise us on the resurrection day, when the Lord returns to take us to be with Him for all eternity, and will give us new incorruptible imperishable bodies

Rom 8:11 ... *“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”*

The Holy Spirit points us to Christ; he convicts and points out the way of salvation through Christ; then to those who are born again, He reveals Christ in them to them to bring them to mature sons – to full stature in Christ; He appoints and anoints for specific ministry that the world may know Christ; then one day He will raise us up and give us new eternal bodies. His ministry in all respects points to and exalts Christ, the Son.

We have looked at the matters of Equality, Authority and Ministry – as they apply to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

- **Equality:** The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are co-equally God.
- **Authority:** The final authority is vested in the Father. The Son honours and points to the Father and the Holy Spirit honours and points to the Son.
- **Ministry:** The Father is the source of all things – He is **the planner** with an eternal purpose, and provider of the means by which His plans may come to fruition; The Son is **the provision** – He is the redeemer, the way, the truth and the life; The Holy Spirit is **the revealer and facilitator** – He reveals the way of salvation, He places the life of the Son in us (the birthing), He helps us renew our minds to align with the life of the Son in us so that He may minister through us.

But what is of great importance is to see and understand that although there is plurality of persons, degrees of authority, and diversity of ministry within the Godhead – there is **absolute unity of purpose**. The Godhead is the very essence and foundation of **plurality in unity** in every respect.

What we do not see in the Godhead is any individual member elevating Himself above the others, or off doing His own thing, or acting independently of the others. We see only plurality in unity. Not uniformity, because we have established the diversity, but in unity. Commonness of purpose – to fulfil the eternal plan of God for Himself, for man and for all of creation.

Now we come back to our original question - How is the Church is to function?

In exactly the same way as we see in the Godhead. We, the church, are to function as a **plurality in unity**. We are all unique individuals with unique characteristics, but all co-equal in value to God. None is better than the other in His eyes. Yes, there may be differing levels of authority as ordained by God, and diversity of ministry amongst us, but this must function in absolute harmony and unity. There must never be one individual elevated above the others or off doing his or her own thing – whether this be an individual seeking self aggrandisement or others pushing him or her to be like that out of false expectations upon the individual because of a label placed on them.

Look at Paul's words to the Ephesians:

Eph 4:1-3, 11-13 ... *“Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ³being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

*¹¹And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³until we all attain to the **unity** of*

the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

Rom 15:5-6 ... *“Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the **same mind with one another** according to Christ Jesus,⁶ so that with **one accord** you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”.*

Rom 12:3-5, 10-12 ... *“For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. ⁴For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another ... ¹⁰Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honour; ¹¹not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹²rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, **devoted to prayer**” ...*

The Key is Mutual Submission

Submission is not to determine the order of authority, but rather it is to govern the operation of authority. It determines how authority is given and received. The Pharisees made a big deal of their authority to make themselves look important. Jesus used His authority to build people up and make them feel appreciated. For example, He washed the disciples' feet. True submission says “others are more important than me”

Phil 2:1-13 ... *“Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ²make my joy complete by being of the **same mind**, maintaining the **same love**, **united in spirit**, intent on **one purpose**. ³Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Mutual submission is the basis for the outworking of unity and growth in healthy, fulfilling relationships.

Eph 5:21 (NKJV) ... *“submitting to one another in the fear of God.”*

1 Pet 5:5 ... *“Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility.”*

These verses are a call to believers to submit to one another. It is through this mutual submission out of an attitude of trust, dependence and humility that we will grow in Christ, maintain our wholeness in Him, and be able to walk in His full purpose for our lives.

But what is submission? Understanding what submission really means will help us to see that it is not a matter of becoming a “doormat” for others or depersonalised in any way.

We get a clear picture from the Latin. It gives us the best definition. Our English word submission comes from the Latin words *sub mitto*. *Sub* means “under” and *mitto* means “send”. Our English word *missive* means letter, which is a written communication that we “send”. Missionary is a “sent” one. Sent for a specific purpose.

So *sub mitto* from which we get our word “submission” really means “to undergird and send off”. Think of it as a rocket engine beneath the space capsule. The rockets engine undergirds the space capsule and sends it off into orbit with a mighty thrust. Without that undergirding and powerful propulsion of the engine the space capsule would never make it into orbit alone, and therefore not able to carry out its intended function in space.

So as we submit to one another we undergird and launch one another into wholeness and victory. Without that undergirding and supportive role there would be no high flying in wholeness and accomplishing our intended purpose in life. There’s nothing “doormattish” about that!

So this is a call to open up to real mutual dependence upon one another. This is best achieved through the holy dynamic of small-group fellowship. This is the God ordained setting in which the healing, enabling, empowering love of Christ is released by the Holy Spirit into our souls.

Rom 5:5 (KJV) ... *“because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost.”*

Mutual submission is a dynamic that enables the successful completion of the building up of one another.

Those who stand together in Christ are instruments in God’s hand to get the building job done. We need one another to get the job done.

Some have resisted this dynamic of growth through relationships because of having been hurt by people in the church. But it wasn’t the “relationship” that didn't work; it was people who didn’t function in the spirit of Christ. So don’t miss the blessing of this commitment to relationships because of past hurts and don’t let others miss the blessing of your input into their lives.

Just remember what someone once said, “There are no Lone Rangers in the kingdom of God. Even the Lone Ranger needed Tonto.”

Eph 4:15-16 ... *“speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,¹⁶ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”*

Fruitfulness and fulfilment can only happen in the context of relationships with other members of the body. The branch that is cut off will wither and die. United we stand, divided we fall.

It's when we are "boots 'n all" stuck in and involved in building and helping others – united in purpose, submitting, giving, assisting, carrying, and encouraging – that we will find that we are transformed, strengthened and made whole in the process. So let us function as a **plurality in unity**, submitting to one another in love – that Christ may be seen in and through us to the glory of God.

Addendum:

It's some time since I gave this message and more recently I have given it more thought, and would like to add this addendum just to provide further understanding more particularly of the "equality" and "ministry" aspects of the "Trinity."

Think of water – H₂O

Equality: H₂O comes in three different forms – Water, Ice and Steam. No matter which form, whether Water (Liquid form), Ice (Solid form), or Steam (Gaseous form), all are equally H₂O.

Ministry: Ministry may be thought of in terms of their use. Water, Ice and Steam all have unique and different uses.

Water is a liquid which may be drunk as a cool liquid to quench our thirst, or heated to make tea or coffee or other warm beverage also to quench our thirst. Water can be used for washing clothes, watering gardens, and a host of other applications.

Ice is cold and can be used to provide a cold environment for preserving food. It can be used to form a cold pad to place on an injury requiring cooling, or used to cool a cool-drink, and so on.

Steam is super-hot and can be used for dry cleaning materials which cannot be washed in water. Steam cleaning is used to clean greasy things like car engines.

You cannot bath in steam or you'll get severe burns. Steam will not cool your drink on a hot day. You cannot clean a greasy engine with ice. Ice is no good for making a hot beverage! Water alone is no good for food preservation in a hot climate, and washing items in water that require to be dry cleaned or steam cleaned will end in disaster.

But Water, Ice and Steam are all H₂O and all have their unique uses.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all co-equally God and each has His unique ministry function.

I trust this helps!