

## Front Door Doctrine: The Trinity<sup>1</sup>

Nothing affects your daily life more than your view of God. Whether you realize it or not, your understanding (or misunderstanding) of God *controls* you. It's constantly influencing your decisions and motivating your actions.

AW Tozer: *"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us"*

Thankfully, we aren't left to ourselves to discover or create a "god" of our own choosing. God has revealed himself to us through the person of His Son and through the truth of His Word.

What is God like?

- The God of the Bible is a living God who acts in space and time.
- He's not an impersonal power or force of energy, but a personal God with a distinct character and nature.
- He's not bound by or one with His creation – He's outside of His creation, yet all things depend on Him for life and breathe and everything.
- The Bible presents God as three distinguishable persons referred to as Father, Son and Spirit.

One day, as St. Augustine (5<sup>th</sup> century) was walking along the seashore, he saw a boy digging in the sand. He asked him what he was trying to do, and the boy said that he was trying to empty the sea into the hole he had dug in the sand. This caused Augustine to think, *"Am I not trying to do the same thing as this child, in seeking to exhaust with my reason the infinity of God and to collect it within the limits of my own mind?"*

Our temptation is to reduce God to a size that our minds can grasp and control. This doctrine/ teaching confronts us with what I believe is one of the most difficult doctrines to grasp. It's not easy, but it's true. Even in it's difficulty to understand, we get a glorious glimpse at the complex nature and beauty of the God we serve.

**Definition:** "God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God."<sup>2</sup>

**The word "trinity" is not in the Bible but the idea it presents is.**

Trinity comes from the Latin word "trinitas" which means "threeness" and the term seeks to *protect* the mystery of the unity and diversity within God Himself (not *explain* it).

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<sup>1</sup> This lesson is a compilation of information found primarily from *Know the Truth* by Bruce Milne, *Christian Beliefs* by Wayne Grudem, and *Big Truth for Young Hearts* by Bruce Ware. I highly recommend these books to you. *Doctrine (What Every Christian Should Know)* by Mark Driscoll, *Bitesize Theology* by Peter Jeffery, *Concise Theology* by JI packer are also wonderful resources I recommend you save up to purchase. You will use resources like these the rest of your life.

<sup>2</sup> Grudem, pg. 104.

# 1. There is one God

The doctrine of the Trinity is *not*:

- A teaching of three gods. That would be polytheism.
- A teaching of One God who reveals himself in three different forms.

The doctrine of the Trinity declares that Jesus has eternally existed as God the Son, and that the Holy Spirit has eternally been God, and that the Father is God.

## **The Bible stands against all forms of idol worship**

Exodus 20:2-6 *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

## **The Bible Forbids Polytheism**

Isaiah 43:10-12 *"You are my witnesses,' declares the LORD, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. **Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.** I, even I, am the LORD, and **apart from me there is no savior.** I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses,' declares the LORD, 'that I am God.'"*

Isaiah 44:8 *"You are my witnesses. **Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one.**"*

Isaiah 45:5-6 *"I am the LORD, and **there is no other; apart from me there is no God.** I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting **men may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other.***

Deuteronomy 6:4 *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."*

So if you're explaining this to a Hindu friend, a JW at your door, a co-worker as you get some coffee...the Bible reveals a God who is ONE.

- In Romans 3:30 Paul says, "God is one"
- In 2 Timothy 2:5 he writes, "There is one God..."  
1 Corinthians 8:4/ Ephesians 4:6/ James 2:19/ 1 Timothy 2:5

He is the self-revealed Creator, who must be worshipped and loved exclusively...

## 2. God exists in three persons

This one God eternally exists in three persons.

### The Father is God

This is clear from Genesis 1:1 on...

### The Son is God

We saw this last month from passages like Colossians 2:9 (the book of Mark).

If Jesus Christ is not the One True God, then He's a liar, because He claims to be both Lord, and Savior, and He received worship as God.

The acts of creation and salvation are attributed to Jesus.

If we accept any explanation of His Deity which makes Him other than the Eternal God, we've accepted a 2<sup>nd</sup> god.

### The Holy Spirit is God

**Acts 5:3-4; Romans 8:9**

The Bible talks about The Holy Spirit's attributes (remember what an attribute is? - a quality, a characteristic, a trait, a feature).

The Holy Spirit has attributes that only *God* could have.

- He knows all things (1 Cor. 2:4-14)
- He's all present (Psalm 139:7-8)
- He was an active part of creation itself (Gen. 1:1-2)
- He's an active part of salvation drawing us in and opening our eyes.

### **He is the third person of the Trinity.**

The Holy Spirit is a divine person, not a thing or an "it" and He's distinct from, but equal with, the Father and the Son.

Who is the Holy Spirit? He is God.

### **Devotions with Jude and Shay: Jesus is in the Garden**

Jesus was praying to the Father the night before his crucifixion. We're acting the scene out – Jude and Shay are the disciples falling asleep – I am acting as Jesus praying to the Father.

Jude blurts out with laughter, "*He's praying to himself?!*"

I was proud of him but I was also tired.

What would you have said? Is that true?

God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit – three in ONE.

*"Daddy (holding up three fingers) not three gods, one God (then the three fingers explode into one). One God. Expressed in three persons.*

This is a glorious mystery that we cannot and should not avoid OR try to tip toe around/ be ashamed of.

This is who God is. Don't you want to know God as He truly is?

### **Some additional OT texts that imply a plurality in God**

In **Genesis 1:26** God said, "*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.*"

God refers to himself in plural forms in several passages: Genesis 3:22; 11:7; Isaiah 6:8).

John treats Isaiah 6 as a vision of Jesus! John 12:41!

Again, it's important to remember God is a self-revealing God and the plurality we see within God is seen because God has revealed it.

- References to the Angel of the LORD who is identified with and yet distinct from God. (Exodus 3:2-6; Judges 13:2-22)
- Do you remember the three angels that appear before Abraham in Genesis 18? At times spoken of as three and at times as one. When they speak it's the LORD who is said to be speaking.
- The Spirit of God is God's personal agent in the OT: (Genesis 1:2; Ne. 9:20; Psalm 139:7; Isaiah 63:10-14)
- Prophecies identify the long awaited for Messiah with God himself.

### **Some additional NT texts that reveal the plurality in God**

#### **Matthew 3:16-17**

When Jesus was baptized all three members of the Trinity were present and performing distinct activities.

#### **Matthew 28:19**

Jesus is affirming that each person of the Trinity is distinct in their personhood (the Father, can't be the Son and so on). **Jude 20-21** does the same thing.

And yet Jesus also affirms their unity.

He tells his disciples to baptize in the name (singular not name(s) plural).

Romans 8:9-11; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 3:6-9; Ephesians 4:4-6

### **There are a lot of *unhelpful* illustrations out there:**

**A triangle** – three sides make up a triangle, etc.

But each side is not *fully* a triangle is it?

It shows a triangle is made up of three parts BUT it does not show one thing that is fully expressed by each of the three parts.

**Water** (it can be three things: solid ice, liquid or vapor). BUT the H<sub>2</sub>O molecules can't all be all three at the same time.

It's a good illustration of **modalism** – God is first the Father, then the Son and now the Spirit.

The Bible teaches that God is the Father, Son and Spirit all at the same time!

### **One circle (drawn using three different colored markers)**

Each color exactly overlapping the other.  
BUT nothing actually does it justice.  
Why? Because God is unique! When the Bible says there is no one like the LORD...it means just that!  
He is the only one true God, unlike anything or anyone else!

Human language is inadequate to put into words, and our minds unable to truly grasp the truths we've come to see revealed here in Scripture.  
God is greater than anything we could imagine. More beautiful than anything we could ever fathom. Stand in wonder!

### **3. Each person is fully and completely God**

These three persons are *completely* equal in attributes, each with the same divine nature.

### **4. Each person has distinct roles/ functions.**

**In salvation** - Ephesians 1:3-14  
Election is referred to the Father (vv. 4, 5, 11)  
Redemption to the Son (vv. 3, 7, 8)  
Sealing to the Spirit (vv. 13, 14)  
We see a distinction and yet ALL THREE are involved in an activity **together**, cooperating **together**, working **together** in harmonious **unity**.

Like a song sung in three parts. Same song, but different parts are sung to bring a beauty and depth that wouldn't be there otherwise.  
The Father, Son and Spirit work in harmony together – with the same goal and purpose.

#### **Ephesians 2:18**

Those who have trusted in Christ are able to come to the Father *because of* the work of Christ and *through* the Spirit.

#### **In creation**

Assigned to the Father in Genesis 1:1 and Revelation 4:11 and many other passages.

Associated with the Son in John 1:3 and Colossians

Associated with the Spirit in Isaiah 40:13!

### **Submission within the Trinity reveals a distinction**

**Philippians 2** tells us that when every knee bows to Jesus it will be to the praise of the Father.

The Son is completely committed to doing the Father's will.

He was, has been and will be committed to this for all eternity! (**John 8:28-29**)

The Father sent the Son (**John 3:17**)

The Son comes into the world to do the Father's will (**John 6:38**)

This kind of submission continues into the future! (**1 Corinthians 15:25-28**)

- Jesus loves to be *under* His Father's authority and The Father loves to lift up His Son to show how great and glorious His Son truly is!
- The Spirit is under the authority of the Father and the Son. (**John 16:12-14**)

We have a lot to learn from this relationship as we relate to each other, submitting to one another.

Marriage in particular is a reflection of this divine unity/ diversity within God!

**1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5**

### So what's really at stake?<sup>3</sup>

- **Salvation is dependent on this truth (Hebrews 9:14)**  
**The Father** planned it and sent Jesus the Son to be our Savior.  
**The Son** died in our place on the cross.  
**God the Spirit** makes this salvation real to us and applies to us the merits of Christ's death – namely the righteousness of Jesus.  
**1 Peter 1:2**  
Redemption *and its application to our lives* depends on the three-in-oneness of God.
- Justification by faith alone: If Jesus is not God; we can't trust Him to save us completely.  
IF Jesus is not God, my sin has nothing to do with him and his death was pointless – insufficient actually!  
If he is going to deal with our sin in any redeeming way, he must be God.
- Prayer and Worship
- God's glory. Scripture teaches that the glory for our salvation is to all go to God. It would not, if the Trinitarian view is not upheld.
- The independence/sufficiency of God. If God does not have eternal fellowship with Himself, then He not only has need, and therefore must create, but is dependent upon His creation.
- **God's love for us**  
God has existed for all time within a relationship with himself.  
There has always been a mutual respect and love.  
Without this unity and diversity within the Trinity we wouldn't have the love revealed in Scripture.  
Within the Trinity is a love that has been expressed for all eternity and now finds expression in creation, redemption...an overflow of Trinitarian love!

What's your response to this?

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<sup>3</sup> The following points are taken from Grudem, pg. 115.