

An Overview of the Biblical Basis for the “Trinity” Doctrine

INTRODUCTION

People often ask, “How can God exist as three Persons and yet be one God?” Others wonder, “Why do Christians believe in the Trinity when that term doesn’t appear in the Bible?” Such questions about this essential Christian doctrine are vital. For if it is true that the Bible is the written revelation from God to mankind (as established by compelling evidences such as fulfilled Bible prophecy), then we would be wise to consider its teachings. Its messages include:

- *Those who embrace the truth of who God is, and receive His free gift of eternal life, will never perish.*
- *We can have a personal and loving relationship with the triune God, fulfilling the purpose for which we were created.*
- *Misinterpreting the basic nature of God can lead to disastrous consequences.*

The doctrine of the Trinity is expressed throughout the pages of the Bible. It is essential to the understanding of the Scriptures, and “the glory of the gospel depends upon this truth.”¹

1 THE TRIUNE NATURE OF GOD

The Bible presents God as one Being, who exists in three distinguishable Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All three Persons in the

Godhead are coeternal, coexistent, and coequal. In other words, “there are three eternal distinctions” in the one divine essence.² The Son and the Spirit are subordinate in role to the Father, yet they are equal in nature. Of course, much about the complex nature of God remains a profound mystery. God is a unique, marvelous Being (Ex. 9:13–14; Jer. 10:6–7), incomprehensible to the finite human mind (Isa. 40:25–26; 55:8–9; Rom.11:33). Surely, if God were small enough for us to understand, He wouldn’t be big enough for us to worship.

UNDERSTANDING THE TRINITY

While no symbol exists in the material universe that can adequately convey the Trinity (tri-unity of God), perhaps the nearest one is displayed here. It is made of one continuous line, representing the one eternal Godhead with three distinct Persons. The Bible teaches that all three Personalities (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) are interconnected, sharing one divine essence. [Note: The Triquetra symbol shown here was used by the early church to represent the Trinity. It appears in many NKJV Bibles.]



2 A FIVE-STEP SCRIPTURAL DEFENSE OF THE TRINITY

The following five steps outline the Bible’s clear teaching of the Trinity. They lead to the conclusion that there are three Persons in the one Godhead. It is extremely important to accept what is directly revealed in the Bible about the nature of God (leading to orthodoxy), rather than to read into the text what is not there to aid in human understanding (leading to heresy). Here is what Scripture teaches:

STEP 1. THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD.

Numerous explicit statements in the Old and New Testaments declare there is only one God of the entire universe. The Bible emphasizes that God is one (monotheism).

Old Testament Examples: Deut. 4:35, 39; 6:4 (the “Shema”); 32:39; 2 Sam. 7:22; 1 Kings 8:60; Isa. 43:10–11; 45:5–6.

New Testament Examples: Mark 12:29–32; Rom. 3:30; 16:27; 1 Cor. 8:4; Eph. 4:6; James 2:19; Jude 25.

STEP 2. THERE ARE THREE PERSONS CALLED “GOD.”

The Father is called “God”; the Son is called “God”; and the Holy Spirit is called “God.”

The Father is “God.” John 17:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:1.

The Son is “God.” Isa. 9:6; Matt. 1:22–23; John 1:1–3; 8:58–59; Heb. 1:8.

The Holy Spirit is “God.” Gen. 1:2; Isa. 61:1; Acts 5:3–4; 2 Cor. 3:17–18.

STEP 3. EACH OF THE THREE PERSONS IS DISTINCT.

Jesus is not the Father; Jesus is not the Holy Spirit; the Father is not the Holy Spirit. Yet there is a “three in oneness.”

Jesus is not the Father. John 1:1; 3:16; 14:6–11; 17:5.

Jesus is not the Holy Spirit. Matt. 4:1; Luke 3:21–22; 4:1; John 3:33–34; 14:16–17; 16:7, 13–15.

The Father is not the Holy Spirit. John 14:26; 15:26; Rom. 8:26–27.

There is a “three in oneness.” Matt. 3:16–17; 28:19; John 14:26; 15:26; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 4:4–6; 1 John 5:7.

STEP 4. EACH OF THE THREE PERSONS POSSESSES ALL THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD.

Each of the three Persons is: (1) omniscient, (2) omnipotent, (3) omnipresent, (4) eternal, (5) holy, (6) creator.

The Father possesses all six of these attributes: (1) Ps. 147:5; Heb. 4:13; 1 John 3:20; (2) Job 42:2; Matt. 19:26; Rev. 19:6; (3) 1 Kings 8:27; Jer. 23:23–24; (4) Gen. 21:33; Ps. 102:24–28; Isa. 40:28; (5) Josh. 24:19; Ps. 99:5, 9; and (6) Gen. 1:1; Ps. 102:24–25.

The Son possesses all six of these attributes: (1) John 2:23–25; 16:30; 21:17; Acts 1:24; (2) Matt. 28:18; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; (3) Matt. 18:20; 28:19–20; 2 Cor. 13:5; (4) John 1:1; 17:5, 24; (5) Mark 1:24; Acts 3:14; 4:27, 30; and (6) John 1:1–3; Col. 1:16.

The Holy Spirit possesses all six of these attributes: (1) John 14:26; 16:12–13; 1 Cor. 2:10–11; (2) Luke 1:35; (3) Ps. 139:7–10; (4) Heb. 9:14; (5) Rom. 1:4; and (6) Job 33:4; Ps. 104:30.

STEP 5. CONCLUSION

Therefore, when considering all these directly revealed biblical teachings on the nature of God, the clear conclusion is that there are three Persons in one Godhead.

ETERNAL TRINITY LOVE

The Bible teaches that God is more than simply “loving”—He is LOVE in His essence (1 John 4:8, 16). Love is always flowing among the three Persons of the eternal Trinity.³ And God created people to love them forever. Thus, He gave us free will so we could voluntarily love Him back.



3 GRASPING A GLIMPSE OF THE TRINITY

It is mind-boggling and futile for finite man to try to grasp the infinite Creator. However, if we meditate on biblical terms that describe the attributes of God, then combine and compound them, we can begin to fathom (and appreciate) an inkling of God's majesty, His might, and His dimensionality.⁴ In theological terms, the God of the Bible is omniscient (all knowing), omnipotent (all powerful), omnipresent (everywhere present), and immutable (unchanging). Scripture also teaches that God is personal, pure love, pure light, holy, just, righteous, and awesome. In mathematical terms, the concept of the Trinity (three-in-one) would be expressed not as $1+1+1=3$, but rather as $1 \times 1 \times 1=1$.

4 THE PROGRESSIVE REVELATION OF THE TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE

THE TRINITY IS IMPLIED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

"While the Trinity is not formally and explicitly set forth in the Old Testament, all the elements of trinitarianism are found there. There is only one God (Ex. 20:3; Deut. 6:4; Isa. 45:18), yet there are three persons who are considered God. Sometimes two are speaking to each other (Ps. 45:6–8; 110:1; Zech. 1:12). Indeed, in one text all three are mentioned together (Isa. 63: 7–10)."⁵

In the OT, the Hebrew word for "one" (*echad*) God (Deut. 6:4) implies a plurality with unity, just as male and female are considered "one" (*echad*) flesh (Gen. 2:24).⁶ In addition, the preincarnate Christ makes several OT appearances called "Christophanies." For example, He is speaking and mentioning two other divine persons in this verse:

"Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, I was there and now the Lord GOD and His Spirit have sent Me" (Isa. 48:16).⁷

THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the NT, the Trinitarian doctrine becomes crystal clear.⁸ A tri-unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is consistently presented. [1] Some passages that state the Trinity specifically are: Matt. 3:13–17 (at Jesus' baptism); Matt. 28:19 (the Great Commission); and John 14:15–26 (Christ's teaching). [2] Some passages that affirm or imply the Trinity are: Acts 2:32–38 (an apostle's sermon); 2 Cor. 13:14 (apostle's benediction); Gal. 4:4–6 (apostle's teaching); and Eph. 3:16–19 (apostle's prayer).⁹ [3] First Corinthians 12:4–6 shows how the Persons of the Trinity interact to direct the ministry of the church. [4] Ephesians 1:1–14 describes how all three Persons relate to one another in redeeming mankind.¹⁰

CONCLUSION

When we consider that God's triune Being is far greater than we can ever comprehend, we are humbled before Him.¹¹ When we consider God's sacrificial love for us, we are drawn to worship Him. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son [Jesus], that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).*

The Bible teaches that when we place our faith in Jesus Christ—who died on the cross and then returned to life—God grants us forgiveness of sin and eternity in heaven. We are given a new life born of the Spirit (John 3:3–6). The Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us, and we can have joyful fellowship with the Father and with His Son (1 John 1:3–4; 5:20; Rom. 8:11). Are you ready to call on the name of Jesus and have a personal relationship with the Living God?

*"Holy, Holy, Holy; Merciful and Mighty!
God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity!"¹²*

A PRAYER TO RECEIVE JESUS CHRIST

"Father God, thank You for sending Your Son to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. Thank You for raising Him from the dead so we can live with You eternally. I believe in Your Son, Jesus, and I receive Him now as my personal Lord and Savior. Thank You for forgiving my sins, and for making me a new creation by Your Holy Spirit. Help me grow in my personal relationship with You, through Your Son. In Jesus' name, amen."



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REFERENCES: ¹Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Moody Press, 1988), 1308. ²Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 98. ³*Ibid.*, 98. ⁴Source unknown. ⁵Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology in One Volume* (Bethany House, 2011), chapter 40, "God's Unity and Triunity," 548. ⁶*Ibid.*, 548. ⁷John F. MacArthur Jr., *God: Coming Face to Face with His Majesty* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 20–21 (quoting from the NASB). ⁸Robert Morey, *The Trinity: Evidence and Issues* (World Bible Publishers, 1997), 246. ⁹Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth* (InterVarsity Press, 1998), 76. ¹⁰"Interaction Within the Trinity" (a study aid), *The Open Bible* (Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1997), 1694. ¹¹Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (InterVarsity Press and Zondervan, 1994), 256. ¹²"Holy! Holy! Holy!" Words by Reginald Heber, 1826, public domain.

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HOW CAN GOD BE THREE-IN-ONE?



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christian apologetics

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