

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ... ABOUT THE TRINITY?

God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity

Our faith is based not upon human reasoning about the nature of God, but upon God's own revelation about Himself given to us through holy men who were moved by the Holy Spirit to write God's Word, the Bible.

It seems clear that when the entirety of the Bible is taken into consideration it reveals that there is only one God, but also shows Him to eternally existing in three persons identified as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each of these three are divine and are clearly separate, yet they all are presented as divine.

Our study this week is to examine some of the clearest statements in Scripture that present this truth and to see some of the ways that people have erred in dealing with this teaching.

DEFINITION OF THE TRINITY

Dr Ryrie, in *Survey of Bible Doctrine*, says in regards to a definition that the theologian Benjamin Warfield has one of the best. He defines Trinity as:

The doctrine that there is one only and true God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three eternal and co-equal Persons, the same in substance but distinct in subsistence.¹

Our doctrinal statement is given on the last page of this study along with two other additions about The Godhead.

DOES THE BIBLE TEACH THE TRINITY?

The word *Trinity* or *Triunity* is not a biblical term, but an attempt to deal with four revelations about God: *oneness*, *distinctness*, *unity*, and *divinity*.

Oneness

1. How do the following verses declare that there is but one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:14; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; and James 2:19)?

Distinctness

2. How do the following verses show that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not one and the same person (Matthew 3:16-17; John 15:26; Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2)?

¹ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, [*A Survey of Bible Doctrine*](#) (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972).

Unity

3. *How do the following verses show the unity of the Godhead (Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14)?*

Divinity

The divinity of God the Father is clearly taught throughout the Bible in both Old and New Testaments. How do we demonstrate that Jesus and the Spirit are also divine? We will look at more about this in later studies.

4. *How do the following verses show the divinity of Christ (John 1:1, 18; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8-10)?*

5. *How does this verses let us know the Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4)?*

IS THIS IMPORTANT?

6. *In your own words, why is the doctrine of the Trinity important in understanding salvation?*

SOME MODERN EXAMPLES OF TRINITARIAN ERRORS

The statement of the doctrine of the Trinity was developed over the years to answer objections of those who rejected Christ and the Word as well as correcting those who tried to work out a way to explain it in philosophical terms without expressing all that the Bible reveals about God.

Gregg Allison in *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, presents three groups which deny the Christian doctrine of the Trinity: *Jehovah's Witnesses*, *Mormons*, and *Oneness Pentecostalism*.

Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the doctrine has no explicit basis in Scripture, was not held by the early church, was derived from paganism, and cannot be true because it is contrary to reason. Specifically, the Bible affirms only that God is one (Deut 6:4; Gal 3:20; 1 Cor 8:4–6); Jehovah's Witnesses believe in radical monotheism that does not allow for a plurality of persons in the Godhead. Denying the deity of Jesus Christ, they hold instead that he is a created spirit being, "the firstborn of all creation" (Col 1:15), who never claimed to be God and who was always inferior to God. Denying the deity of the Holy Spirit, they maintain that it is an impersonal force controlled by God to accomplish his purposes; it is not equal, but always subordinate, to God.

Mormons

The first article of faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormonism) is “We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.” While sounding like an affirmation of the Triune nature of God, this article does not embrace the doctrine of the Trinity. Rather, Mormons believe that the Godhead consists of three distinct beings who are one in purpose but not in nature. Indeed, God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are three separate gods: God the Father is named Elohim, while Jesus is named Jehovah. But the plurality of gods does not stop with these three: Mormonism affirms the existence of many gods, because human beings can become gods. Indeed, God was once a human being who achieved godness. At the same time, the Mormon notion of God is that of an exalted being who has a body of flesh and bones (this affirmation denies the omnipresence of God); indeed, gods can father spirit children who worship them. Strangely, while affirming the existence of a Heavenly Father, Mormonism also affirms the existence of a Heavenly Mother.

This dual reality comes into focus with regard to Mormon teaching about Jesus, who is the spirit child of the Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother as well as the physical offspring of sexual intercourse between God the Father and Mary. Strangely, Mormons continue to hold that Mary was a virgin, but they do so by redefining virginity: it applies only to those who have not engaged in sexual intercourse with a human being. Given that God the Father is not a mortal, but immortal, being, Mary’s sexual activity with him did not violate her virginity. So God the Father had a son Jesus, but not only him: Lucifer was a second son of God and thus the brother of Jesus.

Oneness Pentecostalism

... Built around a first key tenet that God’s name reveals God’s nature, Oneness Pentecostalism moves from the various names of God in the Old Testament to concentration on the particular name of Yahweh as that by which God makes himself known in revelation, with the result that the unity of God is emphasized: “The unity of God is sustained by the absolute unity or oneness of His name.”

A second key tenet follows: the only distinction in God is that of transcendence and immanence. The transcendence of God is designated by “Spirit;” God’s immanence or personhood (and “person” refers to an embodied human being) is his incarnate presence in Jesus. “This ‘Spirit-Person’ dialectic is the principle by which Oneness theology understands the incarnation. It is the one Spirit, the fully-undifferentiated Deity, not the Second Person of the Trinity, who becomes incarnate in the human person from Nazareth. In Oneness terms, the Father (deity) indwells the Son (humanity).”

A third key tenet addresses the threeness of God: Father, Son, and Spirit are three “manifestations”—and by the term “manifestation” is meant a self-revelation—of the one Spirit in Jesus. Accordingly, Oneness Pentecostalism embraces a type of modalism. Accordingly, Oneness Pentecostalism is a species of modalism, with this difference from its earlier formulation: the three are not different names for God in successive periods—Father in the Old Testament, Son in the New Testament, Spirit in the church age—but are simultaneous manifestations of the entire Godhead.²

² Gregg R. Allison, [“Denials of Orthodoxy: Heretical Views of the Doctrine of the Trinity,”](#) *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 16, no. 1 (2012): 24.

SECTION 2. THE GODHEAD

Our present articles of faith states the following:

- a. We believe in one Triune God, eternally existing in three persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit, co-eternal in being co-identical in nature, co-equal in power and glory, and having the same attributes and perfection's. (Deuteronomy 6:4; 2 Corinthians 13:14).

We would like to add Matthew 3:16-17 to that statement as supporting Scripture. We also would like to add two new parts the reasoning for which will be studied and discussed over the next three weeks:

- b. We believe God is the eternal Spirit who created all else and who has revealed Himself to be unchangeable in His being which is among other attributes wisdom and knowledge, power, presence, holiness, love, justice, goodness, and truth.
- c. We believe the term "Father" describes the relationship between God and His Son, Jesus Christ as well as His people Israel and those whom He has called to Himself by faith. As God's children, we expect His discipline. There is a sense in which as Creator, all mankind is His offspring, but not all display His character. He is also described as the Father in heaven indicating both location and supremacy. It was the Father's will that salvation be provided through the Son. The Father determines the times and seasons for the establishment of His "end time" kingdom.

EXPLANATION OF TERMS

Arianism taught that the Son was subordinate to the Father "in respect to essence." He denied the deity of Christ and taught that there was a time when Christ did not exist.

Monarchianism teaches that in the unity of God there is only one monarch or ruler. Jesus, therefore, was merely a man who received Christ from heaven descending as a dove. This is where the power (dynamic) of Jesus came from, not from his divinity.

Modalism was taught by Sabellius (c. 200 AD) spoke of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but understood all three as simply three manifestations of one God.

Person refers to distinctions in the Godhead, designated as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The unqualified use of the word in everyday speech most naturally suggests three separate beings, but this would be tri-theism. For this reason, some have used the term *modus subsistendi* (*modes of subsisting*). The Greek term, *hypostasis*, is sometimes used to describe the threeness as in "one essence, three hypostasis (persons)."

Tri-theism teaches that there are three individuals who are God without affirming their intrinsic unity. John Philoponus taught Father, Son, and Spirit were only related in a loose association as, for example, Peter, James, and John were as disciples.

Tri-Unity declares that within the unity of God there is a threeness: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.