

Trinity

The Christian Understanding of God-^{GM}

This is a study on the doctrine of the *Trinity*.

Christianity Stands Alone In Teaching And Believing In A Triune God

Plus: **Trinity Passages** (see also, **THE DEITY OF CHRIST**)

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The Christian Understanding of God

This is a study on the doctrine of the Trinity. Christianity stands alone in teaching and believing in a Triune God. No other religion in the world presents God in this way. Either there are many gods with one Supreme Being; or, there is One God—singular. Judaism, Islam, and Christian sects, teach that there is but One God. Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and many new age teachings believe there are many gods.

Christianity, orthodox Christianity, teaches and professes a belief in the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. The Apostle's Creed confesses the trinity, many of our favorite hymns sing of the trinity, and many Christians affirm its doctrine without question. Yet, there are many within Christianity, and out, who do not understand it, don't agree with it, or find it confusing. Is the Trinity Biblical? Is the doctrine of the Trinity important? Is it necessary for salvation? What are the consequences of not believing in it?

First, what do we mean when we say the Trinity? From the very first, the church has tried to establish doctrinal standards. From the earliest Christians, we have had conflicts, disagreements, contentions, about what is the truth regarding fundamental teachings in the church. Church Councils were called, the elders gathered, and doctrines were discussed. Some believed this, some that, votes were taken, issues debated, and decisions were made. The books of the New Testament were canonized in a similar way. Important doctrines were agreed upon in this way. Creeds and confessions were established in this way. (The Nicene Creed, the Apostle's Creed, Catechisms, Augsburg Confession, Schlichem Confession, Calvin's Institutes, Articles of Faith, Tridentine Council, etc.) Furthermore, the Catholic Church became dominant in this atmosphere of struggle for the faith. Many different ideas surfaced concerning the teachings of Christ, the nature of God, and of the truth. This is when different sects, cults, and branches of belief sprouted. It is very interesting to note that many of the present day sects of Christianity, present day cults, and divisions today, are really the offspring of

movements in our history. In a very real sense, nothing is new; it just has a new hat or coat on it. For example:

Historical Movements: (In Chronological order)

Gnosticism
Docetism .& Libertinism
Marcionite
Dualism
Montanism
Logos Theology & Monarchiamism
Neoplatonists
Manichaeism
Donatists
Arian Controversy (This is the parent of Jehovah's Witnesses)
Nicene Struggle
Christological Controversies
Nestorianism
Monophysite
Albigensianism
Cathars & Manichaeism

Modern Day Expressions:

Christian Science	Spiritualism
Jehovah's Witnesses	Armstrongism
Mormonism	Eastern Mysticism
The Way international	Unity
Unification Church	

The definition of the Trinity

The definition is sometimes the very thing that causes us difficulty in understanding the doctrine.

Tertullian, an early Christian writer who lived in the second century, a scholar, a tendentious debater of radical and uncompromising spirit of the faith:

'He evolved the earliest systematic form of the doctrine of the Trinity, arguing that there is one 'divine "substance" which is articulated or "Administered" into three distinct but continuous "persons": Father, Logos/Son, and Spirit. At the same time, he offered a reflective account of the incarnation, explaining that the person of Christ is a union of two distinct, unconfused "substances," divine and human, in a single "person" (pg 81)

This terminology became *the basis* of all later Latin and western Trinitarian and Christological discourse.

Special Note: Central to this doctrine and definition is “*The Interpretation of Jesus.*” The trinity doctrine intersects with the incarnation. Furthermore, it builds upon the whole ministry of God sending His Son into the world to save sinners. Jesus is however, more than just a Savior to mankind, He is the focus for the whole of creation, all things were made by and through Him, and for His pleasure they were created (Col.1:16) **Jesus is more than just a divinely used human being, He is God, and as God, eternally significant in all ways like the Father and Spirit.**

Jesus is the Logos/Wisdom of God made flesh. And being the Logos of God, He pre—exists, is divine and creative. Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, I am.” In Jesus, Spirit and flesh, divine and human, are one.

The Trinity Doctrine Became Necessary In Order To Affirm Revelational Truth.

The doctrine evolved in the Church through necessity over against opposing views. It was not that the Church decided to have the “Godhead” of three distinct persons, who are of one divine “substance.” The Church believed in One God, the Church believed in Monotheism. “*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One!*” (Deut. 6:4)

The problem is that strict Monotheistic reasoning does not allow for Jesus being divine. Furthermore, such restrictive interpretations of Monotheism cause great difficulty with Jesus’ new revelations. Much of what Jesus taught, much of what the New Testament affirms, **speaks to His divinity.**

Is Jesus God? I have over 66 citations, both Old & New Testament sources that confirm this to be so. **What do we do with scripture that tells us one thing, but our monotheistic interpretations tell us another?**

This is the tension: first, we have a Savior who is a human being; second, we have this same human being making claims to His divinity; third, we are told that there is only One God.

Is Jesus God? Was Jesus human? Was He both? Can He be God and God be in Heaven? Can God speak to God and still be One?

What we have is two undeniable truths: Jesus was human and that the scriptures affirm that He is divine. **There is the tension!**

The Tension (leads to revelation)

To deny Jesus Christ is human is to deny the testimony found in scripture; To deny that Jesus Christ is divine is to deny the testimony found in scripture; To deny that God is One is to deny the testimony found in scripture; To deny that there are three distinct persons who are divine is to deny the testimony found in scripture; **To affirm them all is Christianity!**

To deny these truths, at any point, is to find oneself in agreement with the earlier movements, or their present day sects, cults, or schisms as listed.

I firmly believe that to deny any one of these truths involved with the Trinity doctrine, **is to make a human effort to relieve the tension**. The tension keeps us on the straight and narrow. **To go to the left or the right is to miss the path, or the truth** (Duet. 17:20).

An Example Of Tension:

Some time back, I heard what happened to a commercial airliner that was flying from Alaska to Seoul S. Korea. The plane had been on automatic pilot. How automatic pilot works is that there is a laser beam that is sent from the destination to the place of origin. The plane's guidance system automatically follows this line; however, the plane doesn't follow it exactly.

The plane's internal guidance constantly corrects itself as it moves toward the destination. The plane swings subtly from one side of the beam to correct itself back across to the other side. The plane travels along the laser beam crisscrossing the line. It sways to the left of the beam, and then corrects itself, to sway to the right, back and forth.

In this particular case, the plane swayed to the right, but never corrected itself, and it drifted over Russian air space. It was totally off course. The tragedy is that the Russians considered them to be intentionally way off course, and accused them of spying. They shot the plane down killing all on board. It was an international crisis event.

The point of bringing this up has to do with the guidance system. It works by remaining in constant tension. When the tension is relived, the system breaks down and the plane goes off course. Likewise, the scripture has many tensions in its revelation of the truth. If we, in our finite minds, try to relive this tension, we will get off course too.

Examples of Tension found in Scripture;

(Otherwise known as apparent contradictions)

Justice (Getting what we deserve) vs. Mercy (Not getting what we deserve)

Forgiveness (released from paying the debt) vs. Law (eye for an eye—paying the debt)

Compromise (negotiating, letting go of something) vs. Integrity (Maintaining the structure, truth of something)

War vs. Peace

Loving Mercy and Kindness vs. Truth

God's Sovereignty (Everything is predetermined—Predestination) vs. Man's free will (We chose our own destiny)

Good works (faith w/out works is dead) vs. Grace (Saved by God's work lest anyone should boast)

Eccl. 3:2-8 A time for...

Birth and Death; plant and uproot; kill and heal; tear down and build up; weep and laugh; mourn and dance; throw stones and gather stones; embrace and refrain from embracing; search and give up as lost; keep and throw away; tear apart and sew together; silent and to speak; love and to hate; war and for

peace...

Special Note: The cross is the ultimate point of Tension! On the cross God satisfies His Holiness and Justice regarding sinful man. Truth and Justice, mercy and kindness meet.

(Psalm 85:10) “Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed.

The Trinity Attributes

Let’s not forget some fundamental truths in our understanding about God. One, God is eternal. Two, God is omnipresent. Three, God is omnipotent. There are attributes here that are infinite. How do we comprehend what is un-comprehensible? How do our finite minds, consciousnesses, and feelings, grasp God? On the one hand, we do comprehend what God is, what God is like, and what God can do, etc.; on the other, we don’t. Both of these things are true: we do and we don’t comprehend the God we believe in—again, a tension.

We cannot comprehend the expanse of space, yet, God is greater. We cannot look upon the Sun, and yet, God is brighter still. We cannot count the sand of the shore, and yet, God knows the number. We cannot think upon two things at once, yet, God knows the thoughts of everyone at the same time. We cannot be in two places at once, yet, we believe God is everywhere at the same time. We have a beginning, a birth; yet, God has always been and will always be. To these things we must falter in trying to grasp them. If we do not just accept them, we will drive ourselves crazy trying to understand it. In this sense, Jesus said we must be like a child. A child doesn’t comprehend, but does accept, so must we.

The problem is that we want to understand and comprehend what we don’t know. But, how do we, finite beings as we are, understand God? It is easy to deny certain things sometimes in order to put other things in a controllable place. With The Trinity, denying its doctrine, is like denying things we don’t understand to place it in a controllable box. We can logically reason $1 + 1 = 2$ yet, there are times when the equation equals 1 or 3. The scripture says a husband and wife are two become one. When however, that two becomes one, sometimes it makes 3, or more (family)! The danger can be in trying too hard to comprehend, forcing an understanding. We make it be the way we want it to be, or can understand it to be. This is a type of arrogance on our part, deciding that what we know or understand is all there is to grasp.

The struggle with the Trinity is whether or not we are dealing in ***polytheism*** or ***monotheism***. Are we talking three Gods or One? In our minds, in our perceptions, one is one being, one substance, and one **in** total. Three is three beings, three substances, or three **in total**; **yet**, there are many things created that do not fall into such simple terms.

Examples:

Water has three forms, ice, liquid, and gas, does that mean water is one in three forms or three in three forms?

An apple is one, yet there are three basic parts to its substance—peel, flesh, and core.

A **Human Being** is one, yet we are a spirit, have a soul, and live in a body.

There are three dimensions, height, width, and depth.

An egg has **three** parts, but is one: shell, white, and yoke.

The **three leaf clover or shamrock**, three leaves with one stem unifying it.

Trinity Passages

Dealing with His Divinity and purpose:

To Reveal God, The Creator, Among Us...

Col, 1:15-18

“He is the *image of the invisible God*, the firstborn over all creation. *For by Him all things were created* that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. *All things were created through Him and for Him.* And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.
And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things *He may have the preeminence.*”

To Show Ownership, Authorship, In Jesus Christ...

Eph. 3:9

“and to make all people see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden *in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;*”

To Show God’s Humility, Servant Hood, And Worthiness To Be Lord...

Phil. 2:5-11

“...who, *being in the form of God.* did not consider it robbery (or something to be held onto) to be equal with God.
“...Given Him the *name which is above every name,* that at the name of Jesus *every knee should bow,* of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and *that every tongue should confess* That Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

Father/Son/Spirit Creating Sons Of God...

Gal. 4:4-7

“But when the fullness of the time had come, *God sent forth His Son*, born of a woman, (note not fathered by a man) born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons! *God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son* into your hearts, crying out “*Abba Father!*” Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

John 16:5-15

- Comforter an advantage
- Another Like Me, not me.
- Father is mentioned
- Witness to the things of the Son, not self.

John 17:1-5

- Jesus prays to the Father, someone else, not to self.
- Speaks of the glory He had with the Father.
- Speaks of His existence before the world began.

John 8:18

- Son is Witness
- Father is Witness; there are two witnesses not one.

John 1:1

- Word was with God
- Word is God
- Word is made flesh

Matt. 28:19

- In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Rom. 8:16

- The Spirit bears Witness, a third witness.

I Tim. 3:16

- God manifest in the flesh--Jesus Christ
- Justified by the Spirit, another! Not self.

I Tim. 4:1

- The Spirit says...not the Father or the Son...

Hebs. 1:1-4

- Sonship--sent in these last days.
- His glory
- Majesty on High
- Angels worship Him
- To the Son He says...
- “You are My Son”
- “Your throne O God endures forever..
- Eternal existence of Christ

Heb. 3:7

- Holy Spirit says...

Heb. 4:14, 15

- The reason He became one of us--identification/connection.

Heb. 6

- God’s infallible purpose—to put upon himself, salvation.

Heb 6:13-20

- Two unchangeables, the Son & the Father.

Heb 7:16

- Power of endless life

Heb 7:24

- Unchangeable priesthood.

Heb. 8

- Mediator of a better Covenant’ (vs. 6)

Heb. 8:7-13

- The first covenant based upon human conditions
- The second covenant based upon divinity, not with human hands.

Heb. 9:15

- Mediator of a New Covenant not by the flesh.

I John 1:1-4

- Witness the divinity, see, held, touched Him.

I John 4:1-3

- Indeed God has come in the flesh.

I John 5:6,7

- Son/Father/Holy Spirit threefold witness.

Rev. 1:8

-Jesus is the Alpha & Omega, the beginning and the end...Almighty God!