

# BIBLICAL TRUTH ABOUT GOD THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT

## Lesson 2: God is Three in One

Biblical doctrine is the study of what the Bible teaches about God and other important truths. This lesson covers biblical truth about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, specifically how the one true God exists in three persons. This is the doctrine of the Trinity or the Triunity of God. Below is a brief excerpt from *What We Teach: Doctrinal Statement of Liberty Baptist Church*.

We teach that there is but one living and true God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:5-7; John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 8:4; 1 Timothy 2:5), an infinite, all-knowing, self-existent Spirit (John 4:24), perfect in all His attributes, one in essence, eternally existing in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14)—each equally deserving worship and obedience.

*What comes to mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us.*

– A. W. Tozer

### MAIN TRUTH, CENTRAL SCRIPTURE, AND OUTLINE

God is three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—in one.  
(John 10:22-38; Acts 5:1-11)

#### 1. God is Father and Son (John 10:22-38)

- A. The Father is God – Jesus taught the role of the Father in salvation (Jn. 6:37-39; 10:27-29).
- B. Jesus is God – Jesus proclaimed His deity by showing His sovereignty to save and preserve sinners, just as the Father does (Jn. 10:27-28). He claimed to be equal with God the Father and that He and the Father are one (Jn. 10:30).

#### 2. God is Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11)

- A. The Holy Spirit is God – Ananias and Sapphira lied to God (vs. 4).
- B. The Holy Spirit is Lord – Ananias and Sapphira agreed to tempt (test) the Spirit of the Lord (vs. 9).

The Holy Spirit is not a part of God nor is He a lesser god. He is one of the three persons of the one true God, along with the Father and the Son.

## MEMORY VERSES

**Matthew 28:19** *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*

**2 Corinthians 13:14** *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.*

**1 Peter 1:2** *Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.*

## ADDITIONAL NOTES

These notes are from *The Holy One: A Handbook of Biblical Truth*, a book being written by Pastor Stan.

*Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as the devout, earnest, continued, investigation of the great subject of the Deity. The most excellent study for expanding the soul is the science of Christ and Him crucified and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity.*

CHARLES H. SPURGEON (1834-1892)

*When we consider the fearful mystery of Thy Triune Godhead we lay our hand upon our mouth. Before that burning bush we ask not to understand, but only that we may fitly adore Thee, One God in Persons Three.*

A. W. TOZER (1897-1963)

## THE TRIUNITY OF GOD IS A FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH

The doctrine of the Trinity is a foundational truth of the Christian faith. This is a doctrine that some groups deny (such as Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses). All Christians believe in the Trinity. MacArthur and Mayhue write: "Though various historical heresies and contemporary cult groups accuse the Trinity of being an illogical doctrine derived from human philosophy, the triunity of God is neither of those things, because it is first and foremost a biblical doctrine. While it may be ultimately incomprehensible, it is not contrary to reason and logic but can be rationally explained, supported, and understood through biblical revelation" (*Biblical Doctrine*, 189). Loraine Boettner says, "The doctrine of the Trinity is perhaps the most mysterious and difficult doctrine that is presented to us in the entire range of Scripture. Consequently, we do not presume to give a full explanation of it. In the nature of the case, we can know only as much concerning the inner nature of the Godhead as has been revealed to us in the Scriptures (cited in "The Triune God," *Free Grace Broadcaster*, Issue 231:1). Bancroft states, "The Trinity of God is His tri-personal existence as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the nature of the one God there are three eternal distinctions which are revealed to us as three equal persons. The tri-personality of the Godhead is exclusively a truth of revelation" (*Christian Theology: Systematic and Biblical*, 85).

Wayne Grudem states: "The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most important doctrines of the Christian faith. To study the Bible's teachings on the Trinity gives us great insight into the

question that is at the center of all our seeking after God: What is God like in himself? Here we learn that in himself, in his very being, God exists in the persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, yet he is one God” (*Systematic Theology*, 226).

In MacArthur and Mayhue’s estimation, “God’s triunity (Trinitarianism) stands arguably as a *sine qua non*, or an indispensable fact, of Christianity. It has been, is, and forever will be an indisputable bedrock belief of the Christian faith” (*Biblical Doctrine*, 344). Lawson agrees that the Trinity is a fundamental Christian truth: “The triunity of God is a subject so profound that it is challenging to wrap our finite minds around it. While it is a truth that is far beyond our limited human capacity to understand, it is nevertheless necessary to believe in order to have a right understanding of who God is. Moreover, it is a truth necessary to affirm in order to hold to virtually every other Christian doctrine” (*Show Me Your Glory*, 29-30).

In addition, it is important to remember that the doctrine of the Trinity is a very practical teaching of Scripture, as Sinclair Ferguson writes: “To become a Christian believer is to be brought into a reality far grander than anything we could ever have imagined. It means communion with the triune God.” He points to John Owen, regarded as the prince of Puritan divines, who “believed that rather than being speculative, the doctrine of the Trinity provided the light by which everything else became clear. Rather than being impractical, it was the most practical truth of all—for what can be more practical than knowing God in Jesus Christ and through the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit?” Ferguson continues: “The forgiveness of sins we enjoy, the peace with God we receive, indeed, our justification and reconciliation are, in one sense, means to this great end—that we might know Him. This is why Paul can describe conversion in these terms: ‘Now that you have come to know God’ (Gal. 4:9). This is surely why the Lord Jesus, in the darkest hours of His disciples’ lives, spent time teaching them the knowledge of God, and especially the interrelationships of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and the significance of these relationships for believers” (Sinclair Ferguson, *The Trinitarian Devotion of John Owen*, 29-31).

## **MEANING OF THE TERM “TRINITY”**

Although the word “trinity” itself is not found in the Bible, the doctrine of the triunity of God is clearly taught. Grudem defines the Trinity in this way: “God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, yet he is one God” (*Systematic Theology*, 226; for a full explanation see 226-261). Lawson writes: “The doctrine of the Trinity is the most mind-stretching truth when it comes to understanding who God is. This is the truth that there is one God who exists in three distinct persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each of the three persons of the Godhead is God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are each fully God. Each of these three divine persons is coequal and coeternal with the other persons of the Trinity. As one God, the three persons share the exact same divine nature” (*Show Me Your Glory*, 29).

1. The word “trinity” (from Latin *trinitas*) means three in one.

God is not three gods, but one God who exists in three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The three persons are co-equal and co-eternal, can be distinguished one from another, share the same divine nature or essence, and relate to one another in unbroken fellowship.

2. The word “trinity” was first used by Tertullian (AD 150-230), one of the Church Fathers.

Tertullian did not invent the doctrine of the Trinity, but he was among the first to explain it in some detail. Alister McGrath comments: “The doctrine of the Trinity wasn’t *invented*—it was *uncovered*. It’s like someone drawing a map which shows all the features of the country, thus allowing you to establish how they relate to each other. Those relations are already there—the map just helps make them clearer” (*Understanding the Trinity*, 148).

3. The Bible reveals the Trinity, but it does not attempt to explain it fully.

“In one sense,” writes Grudem, “the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery that we will never be able to understand fully. However, we can understand something of its truth by summarizing the teaching of Scripture in three statements: 1) God is three persons; 2) Each person is fully God; and 3) There is one God” (*Systematic Theology*, 231).

4. The doctrine of the Trinity is progressively revealed in the Old and New Testaments.

MacArthur and Mayhue write: “While God’s triunity appears implicitly and explicitly throughout the Bible, no one text declares or explains the fullness associated with the incomprehensible triune God. However, the plethora of evidence in both the Old and New Testaments, plus the writings of the early church, make this an overwhelmingly undeniable tenet of biblical orthodoxy” (*Biblical Doctrine*, 345).

The following material in this book is an overview of the basic doctrine of the Trinity. For a more detailed and extensive treatment of the Trinity, the reader is encouraged to consult these helpful resources: Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, 255-334; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 71-89; Beeke and Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, 1:876-953; Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 109-116; Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 102-129; Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.13.64-88; Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:272-331; Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 619-742; Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 89-121; Johnson, *The Identity and Attributes of God*, 25-46; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 226-261; MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 189-210; Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines*, 133-172; and *Free Grace Broadcaster*, Issue 231, “The Triune God,” with the selected writings of Loraine Boettner, William Plumer, Wilhelmus `A Brakel, A. W. Pink, John Owen, and Charles H. Spurgeon.

## **OLD TESTAMENT REVELATION OF GOD’S TRIUNITY**

The doctrine of the Trinity is suggested or partially taught in the Old Testament. Grudem observes: “If God has eternally existed as three persons, it would be surprising to find no indications of that in the Old Testament. Although the doctrine of the Trinity is not explicitly found in the Old Testament, several passages suggest or even imply that God exists as more than one person” (*Systematic Theology*, 226).

1. The Old Testament stresses the unity or oneness of God.

**Deuteronomy 6:4** *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD.* The Hebrew adjective “one” (*ekhad*) affirms God’s unity but can allow for plurality in that unity. This is the same word used in Genesis 2:24 describing the “one flesh” of husband and wife.

**Isaiah 46:9** *Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me.*

2. God has a plural name (Heb., *Elohim*).

**Genesis 1:1-2** <sup>1</sup> *In the beginning God (Elohim) created the heaven and the earth.* <sup>2</sup> *And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.* God’s name is plural, but it is used with a singular verb.

3. God speaks of Himself with a plural pronoun.

**Genesis 1:26** *And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.*

**Genesis 3:22** *And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever.*

**Genesis 11:7** *Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.*

**Isaiah 6:8** *Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.* Note the combination of the singular (“I”) and plural (“us”) in this verse.

4. The Old Testament refers to more than one person as “God.”

**Psalms 45:6-7** <sup>6</sup> *Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre.* <sup>7</sup> *Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.* The author of Hebrews states that “God” will say the words of Psalm 45:6-7 to “the Son,” who will be enthroned as “God” by “God” (Heb. 1:8).

**Psalms 110:1** *The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.* This messianic psalm is the Old Testament text most frequently quoted and alluded to in the New Testament. In this verse Yahweh (LORD) speaks to the Messiah (my Lord). The New Testament identifies Jesus as the “Lord” to whom the “LORD” speaks.

**Malachi 3:1-2** <sup>1</sup> *Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.* <sup>2</sup> *But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap.* Here the one speaking (“the LORD of hosts”) is distinct from “the Lord whom ye seek,” suggesting two separate persons, both of whom are called “Lord.”

5. The Old Testament reveals that God has a Son. The New Testament applies this truth to Jesus as the eternal, divine Son of God.

**Psalms 2:6-7** <sup>6</sup> *Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. <sup>7</sup> I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.*

6. The Old Testament reveals the angel of Yahweh as a divine person and yet distinct from God (Gen. 16:13; Ex. 3:2-6; 23:20-22; Num. 22:35, 38; Judg. 2:1-2; 6:11, 14).

7. The Old Testament speaks of the Holy Spirit as God with divine attributes.

**Psalms 139:7** *Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?*

**Isaiah 11:2** *And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.*

B. B. Warfield summarizes the Old Testament teaching of the Trinity: “The mystery of the Trinity is not revealed in the Old Testament; but the mystery of the Trinity underlies the Old Testament revelation, and here and there almost comes into view. Thus the Old Testament revelation of God is not corrected by the fuller revelation which follows it, but only perfected, extended and enlarged” (cited in MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 200).

## **NEW TESTAMENT REVELATION OF GOD’S TRIUNITY**

The doctrine of the Trinity is clearly and more completely taught in the New Testament.

1. The New Testament confirms the Old Testament teaching about God’s unity.

**Mark 12:28-30** <sup>28</sup> *And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? <sup>29</sup> And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: <sup>30</sup> And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.*

**John 17:3** *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*

**1 Timothy 2:5** *For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*

2. Three persons of the Trinity are present at Christ’s baptism.

**Matthew 3:16-17** <sup>16</sup> *And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: <sup>17</sup> And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* At the same time all three persons of the Trinity performed three distinct actions. The Father spoke from heaven when the Son came out of the water and the Spirit of God descended in the form of a dove.

3. Three persons of the Trinity are included in Christ’s promise to the disciples.

**John 14:16-17** <sup>16</sup> *And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; <sup>17</sup> Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.* The word translated “another” (Gr., *allos*) means another of the same kind. Christ prays to the Father and promises that the Holy Spirit will come to dwell in believers.

4. Three persons of the Trinity are included in Christ’s commission to the disciples.

**Matthew 28:19** *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.* Note the singular “name” and the reference to three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

5. Three persons of the Trinity are mentioned together in Paul’s epistles.

**1 Corinthians 12:4-6** <sup>4</sup> *Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. <sup>5</sup> And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. <sup>6</sup> And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.*

**2 Corinthians 13:14** *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.*

**Ephesians 4:4-6** <sup>4</sup> *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; <sup>5</sup> One Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

6. Three persons of the Trinity are all referred to as God.

**Romans 1:7** *To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

**John 1:1** *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

**Acts 5:3-4** <sup>3</sup> *But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? <sup>4</sup> Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.*

7. Three persons of the Trinity are all distinct from one another.

**John 1:1-2** <sup>1</sup> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> The same was in the beginning with God.*

**John 17:24** *Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.*

All three persons relate to one another and each one has a special role. Jesus prayed to the Father. The Father gave the Son and sent Him to earth. The Son promised to send the Holy Spirit. The Son obeys the Father, and the Holy Spirit obeys the Father and the Son. They are different, yet they are all co-equal and co-eternal.

8. Three persons of the Trinity have the same divine attributes.

All three persons of the Trinity are eternal, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, and holy.

9. Three persons of the Trinity have divine prerogatives (rights).

All three persons have the right to receive worship, forgive sin, and exercise judgment.

10. Three persons of the Trinity perform divine actions.

All three persons create and sustain life, raise the dead, and reveal truth.

11. Three persons of the Trinity were involved in creation.

**Exodus 20:11** *For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.*

**John 1:3** *All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.*

**Genesis 1:2** *And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*

When the universe was created God the Father spoke the powerful words that brought all things into existence, God the Son was the agent who carried out those words, and God the Holy Spirit was active “moving over the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:2).

12. Three persons of the Trinity were involved in Christ’s resurrection.

**Acts 3:26** *Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.*

**John 2:19** *Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*

**Romans 8:11** *But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.*

13. Three persons of the Trinity are involved in the redemption of sinners.

The Father planned redemption. The Son purchased it. The Holy Spirit applies it. MacArthur and Mayhue conclude: “In the context of the New Testament, only God can provide what the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are revealed as providing for the eternal salvation of believers in Christ” (*Biblical Doctrine*, 202). Tozer states: “The Persons of the Godhead, being one, have one will. They work always together, and never one smallest act is done by one without the instant acquiescence of the other two. Every act of God is accomplished by the Trinity in Unity.” He concludes: “God cannot so divide Himself that one Person works while another is inactive. In the Scriptures the three Persons are shown to act in harmonious unity in all the mighty works that are wrought throughout the universe” (*Knowledge of the Holy*, 30-31).

## **MISLEADING ANALOGIES ABOUT GOD’S TRIUNITY**



Attempts have been made to illustrate the Trinity by using analogies drawn from nature or human experience, all of which prove to be inadequate or misleading. For a full discussion see Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 240-241.

1. The Trinity is like a three-leaf clover, which has three parts yet remains one clover. In the Trinity each of the persons is not just a separate part of God, but each person is fully God.

2. The Trinity is like the three parts of a tree: roots, trunk, and branches all constitute one tree. The problem with this analogy is these are only parts of the tree and none of the parts is the entire tree.

3. The Trinity is like three forms of water: steam, water, and ice. This analogy is inaccurate because no quantity of water ever exists in all three forms at the same time and they all have distinct properties or characteristics.

4. The Trinity is like three roles of a man. For example a man could be a farmer, a mayor of his town, and a leader in his church. He functions in these different roles at different time, yet he is one man. This analogy is flawed because it does not account for the separate persons in the Trinity and the personal interaction between them.

5. The Trinity is like three elements of human personality: the intellect, the emotions, and the will in one human being. The analogy is misleading because no single element constitutes the entire person.

In conclusion, Grudem observes that “Scripture nowhere uses any analogies to teach the doctrine of the Trinity.” He adds, “It is best to conclude that no analogy adequately teaches about the Trinity, and all are misleading in significant ways” (*Systematic Theology*, 241). MacArthur and Mayhue concur: “No illustration can fully communicate the Trinity, because the Trinity is God and always transcends the created order in essence, persons, and relationships” (*Biblical Doctrine*, 193).

## **DOCTRINAL ERRORS ABOUT GOD’S TRIUNITY**

It is important to understand some of the doctrinal errors about the Trinity that have emerged in church history, some of which are still promoted and accepted today. For a full discussion of these doctrinal errors see MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 208-210, and Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 241-256. The statements within long-standing historical Christian creeds, confessions, and catechisms provide safe, helpful guidelines for understanding the biblical doctrine of the Trinity and also equip us to detect false teaching. See Chapter 28, “The Doctrine of God in Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms.”

1. Monarchianism was an early form of Unitarianism. One form of this false teaching was dynamic monarchianism which considered the Father alone is God and Jesus was merely a man indwelt by an impersonal divine force (the Logos) either at his birth, his baptism, or his resurrection. Another form was called modalistic monarchianism or modalism (see below).

2. Modalism claims that there is one person who appears to us in three different forms (modes): Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is also called Sabellianism, after a teacher named Sabellius who lived in Rome in the early third century A.D.

3. Arianism denies the full deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit. This term comes from Arius, a Bishop of Alexandria, whose views were condemned at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 and also at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

4. Subordinationism holds that the Son was eternal and divine, but still not equal to the Father in being or attributes. The Son was therefore inferior or subordinate in being to God the Father.

5. Adoptionism is the view that the Son lived as an ordinary man until his baptism when God “adopted” him as his “Son” and conferred on him supernatural powers. Even after his adoption Christ was not divine in nature, but only an exalted man whom God called his “Son.”

Grudem describes God’s providential use of godly men and church councils to defend and clarify Trinitarian truth. He writes: “Although many early church leaders contributed to the gradual formulation of a correct doctrine of the Trinity, the most influential by far was Athanasius.” He adds, “the Athanasian Creed which bears his name is not today thought to stem from Athanasius himself, but it is a very clear affirmation of Trinitarian doctrine that gained increasing use in the church from about A.D. 400 onward” (*Systematic Theology*, 245).

## **SUMMARY OF BIBLICAL TEACHING ON GOD’S TRIUNITY**

1. There is only one God. There are not three different Gods (a heresy called “tri-theism”).

2. God exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

3. Each person of the Trinity is fully God.

The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God.

4. God is both one and three.

Although we cannot fully comprehend how these truths coexist, we must believe and confess both truths with equal conviction. False teaching occurs when we hold one truth and deny the other or when we emphasize one truth over another. Truth out of balance is error. Truth must be held in tension although we cannot fully comprehend or explain it.

5. The persons of the Trinity are real and distinct.

God is not just one person who has three identities, has three different names, or reveals Himself in three different forms or modes (a heresy called “modalism”). The Trinity has no perfect analogies in human experience. Some analogies have been suggested, but all of them are inadequate and misleading (e.g., a three-leaf clover; a tree with roots, trunk, and branches; steam, water, and ice). Scripture reveals the following truths:

- A. The Father is God.
- B. The Son is God.
- C. The Holy Spirit is God.
- D. The Father is not the Son.
- E. The Father is not the Holy Spirit.
- F. The Son is not the Holy Spirit.

6. The persons of the Trinity are perfectly equal, but they manifest themselves in different ways and carry out different functions. Each person of the Trinity possesses the entire essence of God.

Grudem offers this helpful summary: “Finally, it may be said that there are no differences in deity, attributes, or essential nature between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each person is fully God and has all the attributes of God. *The only distinctions between the members of the Trinity are in the ways they relate to each other and to creation.* In those relationships they carry out roles that are appropriate to each person” (*Systematic Theology*, 251).

7. The mystery of the Trinity is not a reason to deny it.

Paul Washer states: “Some may say that they cannot believe what they cannot understand—if something cannot be explained, it cannot be true. If we were to apply this same logic to the entire Bible or even to our own existence, then there would be very little left for us to believe. Even the simplest truths of Scripture and of human reality go beyond our understanding. Our belief in the Trinity is based not upon our imperfect understanding, but upon the true testimony of Holy Scriptures” (*Knowing the Living God*, 17). Sinclair Ferguson comments: “There is mystery here, but it is the mystery of infinite glory and leads to humble adoration and devotion” (*The Trinitarian Devotion of John Owen*, 37).

Chafer comments: “Doubtless this is one of the greatest of mysteries. The doctrine reaches beyond the range of human understanding, though it is a fundamental in the divine revelation” (*Systematic Theology*, 1:25). The Trinity is a mystery in two senses. It is a mystery in the biblical sense because it was known only by God until He revealed it in Scripture. It is also a mystery in the sense that it is ultimately beyond human reason and comprehension. Tozer writes: “The Church has not hesitated to teach the doctrine of the Trinity. Without pretending to understand, she has given her witness, she has repeated what the Holy Scriptures teach” (*Knowledge of the Holy*, 26). He adds: “It is most important that we think of God as Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance. Only so may we think rightly of God and in a manner worthy of Him and of our own souls” (*Knowledge of the Holy*, 28). Boice echoes the necessity of thinking clearly and biblically about the Trinity: “God has revealed some of his complexity to us in the doctrine of the Trinity. What we know about the Trinity we know only because of God’s revelation of it in the Bible, and even then we don’t know it well. In fact, so prone are we to make mistakes in dealing with this subject that we must be specially careful lest we go beyond or misrepresent what we find in Scripture” (*Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 110).

The doctrinal statement of The Master’s Seminary in California accurately summarizes the truth of God’s triunity: “We teach that there is but one living and true God (Deut. 6:4); Isa. 45:5-7; 1 Cor. 8:4;), an infinite, all-knowing Spirit (Jn. 4:24), perfect in all His attributes, one in essence, eternally existing in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14)—each equally deserving worship and obedience” (cited in *Biblical Doctrine*, 345). Augustine observed: “In no other subject is error more dangerous, or inquiry more laborious, or the discovery of truth more profitable” (cited in Sinclair Ferguson, *The Trinitarian Devotion of John Owen*, 37).

## **SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS OF GOD’S TRIUNITY**

1. The Trinity teaches us that God is relational.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have existed eternally in a relationship of perfect unity and love. The believer has the special privilege of entering into this fellowship (Jn. 14:16-18, 23; 1 Jn. 1:1-3).

2. The Trinity teaches us that God has no need.

God did not create mankind or redeem sinners because He was lonely or needy, but only for His own glory. God has no need for anyone or anything outside of Himself.

3. The Trinity teaches us that God is love.

The perfect expression of God’s eternal love is found among the persons of the Trinity.

4. The Trinity teaches us that salvation is the work of God.

Salvation is entirely the work of God. Each person of the Trinity is involved in the work of salvation, therefore believers can have unwavering confidence that God will complete His saving work in all of His people (Phil. 1:6).

5. The Trinity is the supreme model for human relationships.

The persons of the Trinity exist together in perfect equality and unity, yet they have different roles or functions. Although equal with the Father, the Son submitted to the Father’s will and humbled Himself to the point of death on the cross (Phil. 2:6-8). Submission is not demeaning or a mark of inferiority. This kind of submission is the perfect model for human relationships in the church (leaders and congregation), family (husbands and wives; parents and children), and employment (employers and employees). These five implications of God’s triunity are presented in Paul Washer’s excellent book, *Knowing the Living God*, 18.

## QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND MEDITATION

1. What is a simple definition of the Trinity?
2. How is the doctrine of the Trinity progressively revealed in Scripture?
3. The doctrine of the Trinity was not invented, but uncovered. Explain this statement.
4. To what extent is the doctrine of the Trinity taught in the Old Testament?
5. What Old Testament teachings suggest that God exists as more than one person?
6. Which New Testament scriptures confirm the doctrine of God's unity?
7. How are the three persons of the Trinity revealed in the New Testament?
8. Why is the mystery of the Trinity not a reason to deny it?
9. Why are analogies of the Trinity inaccurate and misleading?
10. How is the Trinity a model for human relationships?

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*I cannot think about the One without being instantly surrounded by the splendor of the Three, nor can I discern the Three without being immediately drawn back to the One.*

GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS (329-390 AD)

*Our narrow thoughts can no more comprehend the Trinity in unity than a nutshell will hold all the water in the sea.*

THOMAS WATSON (1620-1686)

*If some watcher (angel) or holy one who has spent his glad centuries by the sea of fire were to come to earth, how meaningless to him would be the ceaseless chatter of the busy tribes of men. How strange to him and how empty would sound the flat, stale, and profitless words heard in the average pulpit from week to week. And were such a one to speak on earth would he not speak of God? Would he not charm and fascinate his hearers with rapturous descriptions of the Godhead? And after hearing him could we ever again consent to listen to anything less than theology, the doctrine of God? Would we not thereafter demand of those who would presume to teach us that they speak to us from the mount of divine vision or remain silent altogether?*

A. W. TOZER (1897-1963)