

Study 2

THE TRIUNE GOD

There is One God, who has always existed in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; 2Cor. 13:14).

There is a difference between *apprehension* (seeing something) and *comprehension* (understanding something). In looking at what the Bible teaches about the Triune God, we need to firstly *apprehend* what the Bible actually says about the 'Trinity'. This is important because there is so much teaching about God that either distorts the Trinity - or outright denies it. We will overview what the Bible says about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We will then highlight some of the historic errors regarding the Trinity, and conclude with the implications for understanding of why the Trinity is so important because it is who God is.

1. Note what these Scriptures tell us about God. God is -

_____ (John 4:24)

_____ (Rom. 1:20; Col. 1:15)

2. What do these Old and New Testament Scriptures state about God?

Duet. 6:4; Mark 12:29; John 17:3; 1Cor. 8:4, 6

The Scriptures assert from the outset that God is the Creator (Gen. 1:1).

3. Who actually did the creating of the universe?

a) Gen. 1:1

b) Col. 1:16

c) Job. 33:4

4. Only God is *eternal*. He is therefore dependent upon no-one or no-thing for His existence. Created beings on the other hand are what Theologian-Philosophers refer to as *contingent beings* - that is we are all contingent (dependent) upon Someone and somethings for our existence. When Moses asked God about His Name and identity, the Lord replied, "I AM" (YHWH) thus claiming to be the uniquely eternal One. Note who is described as "eternal" and how this reveals their true identity-

a) Deuteronomy 33:27

b) Isaiah 40:28

c) Hebrews 9:14

d) Psalm 90:2

e) John 8:28

5. How do these Old Testament Scriptures support the idea of the Trinity-

Gen. 1:26

Gen. 18:2

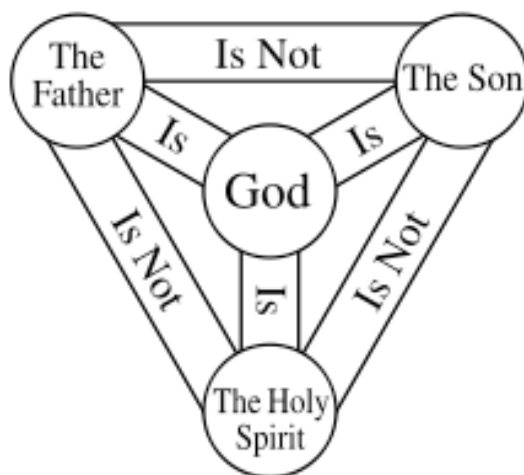
Isaiah 48:16

6. In what way is the Trinity seen at the water baptism of Christ? (Matthew 3:16-17)

7. How does the apostolic benediction in Second Corinthians 13:14 point to the Trinity?

8. Paul sums up the Gospel in Ephesians 2:18. In what way does he see the Trinity playing a role in our salvation?
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In the Book of Revelation, chapters 4 and 5, we see the Trinity pictured where the Father is on the Throne, Christ the Lamb enters while the “Seven” Spirits of God surrounds God’s Throne like flames. God is eternally: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.



"God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance (homoousios) with the Father".

Nicene Creed

The Athanasian Creed states (note its use of the “Catholic” denotes *the Universal Church*) -

And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;

Neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance.

For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit.

But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit.

The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated.

The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible.

The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal.

And yet they are not three eternal but one eternal.

As also there are not three uncreated nor three incomprehensible, but one uncreated and one incomprehensible.

So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty.

And yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God;

And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.

So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord;

And yet they are not three Lords but one Lord.

For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord;

So are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say; There are three Gods or three Lords.

The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten.

The Son is of the Father alone; not made nor created, but begotten.

The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.

So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.

And in this Trinity none is afore or after another; none is greater or less than another.

But the whole three persons are coeternal, and coequal.

So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.

He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.

9. How does Christ's Commission to His Church Matthew 28:18-19 emphasise the importance of the Trinity in preaching, conversion, and discipleship?
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Some people regard the Holy Spirit merely as *the presence* of God, in a similar way to describing the atmosphere at a party with the word *spirit* - "*There was a fun spirit at the party...The party spirit spilled over ...*" But the Holy Spirit is not merely a vibe or an attitude, He is a Person (note for example, Acts 5:3).

10. Why does a Scripture like Acts 5:3 show us that the Holy Spirit must be a person? (Note also Acts 21:11)
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FALSE VIEWS OF THE TRINITY

Modalism

This is the teaching that there is one God who has expressed Himself in three different ways. Firstly, He expressed Himself in the mode of “Father” under the Old Covenant. He then expressed Himself as “Jesus” during the time of Christ on earth. After Christ left, God began to express Himself in the mode of the Holy Spirit. This heresy is also referred to as Sabellianism (named after Sabellius who also promoted this false teaching).

Consider the water baptism of Jesus where Christ was in the water, the voice of His Father in heaven was heard, and the descent of the Holy Spirit was seen. Also, consider that Jesus prayed to His Father and taught us to pray similarly. He was surely not praying to Himself!

Polytheism

This is the view that there are three gods known as ‘The Father’, ‘The Son’, and ‘The Holy Spirit’. But this view is countered by the teaching of Scripture which stresses that there is just one God. The first of the 10 Commandments stress this. Interestingly, the Hebrew word for “one” when it declares, *Hear O Israel... the LORD our God is “one”...* (Duet. 6:4) is the word ‘echad’ which means “united”. That is, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are so united they are “one”.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF UNDERSTANDING THE TRINITY

Mankind is created in the image of Triune God. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have eternally existed in the most intimate common-unity possible. That is, they have eternally and infinitely enjoyed being in community together. The immediate implication of this is

that *we* are created to also be in community. We are created to love and be loved.

11. Reconsider 2Corinthians 13:14. Are there any implications of understanding the Trinity for us in this verse?



We are created male and female

to complement each other in the same way that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each different yet infinitely complementary. This is why, the first thing God did with the first two people He created was to *marry* them to each other. *Marriage* is a reflection of the Trinity.

12. What implications are there from understanding the Trinity for how we treat marriage?

13. What implications of the Trinity are there for how we relate to each other in the church, especially our small groups?

Who God is, is foundationally important. If we misrepresent God we will likely misrepresent the message of Scripture. We therefore reject false and distorted views of the Trinity, even from popular preachers, such as-

This doctrine is central to historic, orthodox Christian faith. While there is only one God, God is somehow present everywhere. People began to call this presence, this power of God, his 'Spirit'. So there is God, then there is God's Spirit. And then Jesus comes among us and has this oneness with God that has people saying things like God has visited us in the flesh (John 1:14). So God is one, but God has also revealed himself to us as Spirit and then as Jesus. One and yet three. This three-in-oneness understanding of God emerged in several hundred years after Jesus' resurrection. People began to call this concept the Trinity. The word trinity is not found anywhere in the Bible. Jesus didn't use the word, and the writers of the rest of the Bible didn't use the word.

But over time this belief, this understanding, this doctrine, has become central to how followers of Jesus have understood who God is. It is a spring, and people jumped for thousands of years without it (this fact, of course, doesn't make the doctrine any less true. It's been true all along; people just 'recently' discovered it.) It was added later. We can take it out and examine it. Discuss it, probe it, question it. It flexes, and it stretches. (Pg.22) It has brought a littler, deeper, richer understanding to the mysterious being who is God...Our words are not absolutes. Only God is absolute... The moment God is figured out with nice neat lines and definitions, we are no longer dealing with God. We are dealing with somebody we made up.

Rob Bell, "Velvet Elvis", pages 22, 25

Amen.