

# THE TRINITY



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## Introduction

Trying to explain God is very difficult. He is not like you and me. Think about it. He has always existed with no beginning or end. He is in everyplace at all times. He is all-powerful. He knows our future before it happens. He is the fullness of Love, Joy, Peace, Longsuffering, Kindness and so on and on it goes. Who can instruct Him or even search the depths of His being?

One of the great mysteries of God is the concept of a being that is three in one. The Bible says that God is one, “[Deuteronomy 6:4](#) - Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD.” Jesus even said that God is one Lord. [Mark 12:29](#). So why do Christians believe in a triune God?

### *Webster’s Definition*

**Trinity:** Webster’s dictionary gives the following definition of trinity: “The union of three divine persons (or hypostases), the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in one divinity, so that all the three are one God as to substance, but three Persons (or hypostases as to individuality).” Synonyms sometimes used are triunity, trine, triality.

The term “trinity” is formed from “tri,” three, and “nity,” unity. Triunity is a better term than “trinity” because it better expresses the idea of three in one.

God is three in one. Hypostases is the plural of *hypostasis* which means “the substance, the underlying reality, or essence.”

## **The Doctrine of The Trinity** (Excerpts From Bible.org)

The doctrine of the trinity states that there is one God who is one in essence or substance, but three in personality. This does not mean three independent Gods existing as one, but three Persons who are co-equal, co-eternal, inseparable, interdependent, and eternally united in one absolute Divine Essence and Being.

**Essence:** In its theological usage, essence refers to “the intrinsic or indispensable, permanent, and inseparable qualities that characterize or identify the being of God.” The words triunity and trinity are used to refer to the fact that the Bible speaks of one God, but attributes the characteristics of God to three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**Person:** In speaking of the Triunity, the term “person” is not used in same way it is in ordinary usage in which it means *an identity completely distinct from other persons*. Actually the word *persons* tends to detract from the unity of the Trinity. According to the teaching of Scripture, the three Persons are inseparable, interdependent, and eternally united in one Divine Being.

Typically, the words *triunity* and *trinity* are used to help us express a doctrine that is scriptural, though replete with difficulties for the human mind. Again, it needs to be emphasized that this is a doctrine that is not explicitly stated either in the Old or New Testaments, but it is implicit in both. Note the following points:

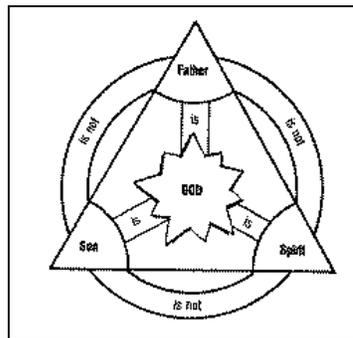
- (1) Evangelical Christianity has believed in the doctrine of the Trinity, Triunity, or the Triune Godhead because of the teaching of the Bible as a whole (Old and New Testaments) and not because of one or two particular passages. The whole of Scripture gives testimony to this doctrine.
- (2) There are many specific passages which teach us there are three distinct Persons who possess deity, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, but the Bible also teaches us with equal emphasis

that there is but one true God or one Divine Essence or Substance and Being.

- (3) Taking the whole of Scripture, one can see that there is stress on: (a) the unity of God, one Divine Being and Essence, and (b) on the diversity of God in this unity, three Persons identified as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It speaks of these Persons in such a way that it ascribes absolute undiminished deity and personality to each while stressing that there is but one God in divine substance. It is the doctrine of the trinity that harmonizes and explains the thrusts of Scripture—oneness in three personalities.

When we see that the Bible teaches these three things: (a) there is but one God, (b) that the Father, Son, and Spirit are each God, and (c) that each is set forth as distinct Persons, we have enunciated the doctrine of the Trinity of God.

## Ancient Diagram of The Holy Trinity



The three Persons are the same in substance, i.e., in essence or in their essential nature, but distinct in subsistence which describes God's mode or quality of existence in three Persons. By mode of existence we do not mean one God acting in three different ways, but one Divine Being existing in three distinct Persons within one Divine Substance or Essence.

Again, this is not exactly three individuals as we think of three personal individuals, but one Divine Being who acts and thinks as one within a three-fold personality. This is incomprehensible to our finite and limited minds, but it is the teaching of the Scripture. "There are not three individuals, but only three personal self distinctions within the one Divine Essence."

## Historical Background

Though the Bible taught truth of the Triunity of God implicitly in both Old and New Testaments, the development and delineation of this doctrine was brought about by the rise of heretical groups or teachers who either denied the deity of Christ or that of the Holy Spirit. This caused the early church to formally crystallize the doctrine of the Triunity. Actually, Tertullian in 215 A.D. was the first one to state this doctrine using the term, Trinity. Concerning the struggle the early church went through, Walter Martin writes:

As the New Testament was completed toward the close of the first century, the infant church was struggling for its life against old foes—*persecution and doctrinal error*. On the one hand were the Roman Empire, Orthodox Judaism, and hostile pagan religions, and on the other hand were heresies and divisive doctrines. Early Christianity was indeed a perilous experiment.

Probably no doctrine was the subject of more controversy in the early church than that of the Trinity. Certainly the teaching of “one God in three Person” was accepted in the early church, but only as this teaching was challenged did a systematic doctrine of the Trinity emerge.

The Gnostic heresy, for instance, (which permeated Christendom in the lifetime of the apostles) drew strong condemnation in Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and John’s First Epistle. Denying the deity of Christ, the Gnostics taught that he was inferior in nature to the Father, a type of super-angel of impersonal emanation from God.

Following the Gnostics came such speculative theologians as Origen, Lucian of Antioch, Paul of Samosota, Sabellius, and Arius of Alexandria. All of these propagated unbiblical views of the Trinity and of the divinity of our Lord.

But perhaps the most crucial test of Christian doctrine in the early church was the “Arian heresy.” It was this heresy, which stimulated the crystallization of thought regarding both the Trinity and the deity of Christ.

Today there are still remnants of the Gnostic heresy (Christian Science), the Arian heresy (Jehovah's Witnesses), and the Socinian heresy (Unitarianism) circulating in Christendom. All of these errors have one thing in common—they give Christ every title except the one, which entitles Him to all the rest—the title of God and Savior.

But the Christian doctrine of the Trinity did not “begin” at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D., nor was it derived from “pagan influences.” While Egyptian, Chaldean, Hindu, and other pagan religions do incorporate so-called “trinities,” these have no resemblance to the Christian doctrine, which is unique and free from any heathen cultural vagaries

The point, then, is simply this: While the term *Trinity* is never specifically used nor the doctrine explicitly explained in Scripture, it is nevertheless implicitly stated. The church councils, in their fight against heresy, were forced to think through what the Bible says about how God exists. The result was the doctrine of the Triunity, but let it be emphasized; the development of this doctrine was based on a careful study of Scripture.

Cairns discusses this theological controversy in the early church and the extreme care given to this issue:

It was an era when the main dogmas of the Christian Church were developed. The unfavorable connotation conveyed by the word “dogma” in a day of doctrinal laxity, such as the present, should not obscure the value to the Church of dogma. The word “dogma” came through the Latin from the Greek word *dogma*, which was derived from the verb *dodeo*. This word meant to think. The dogmas or doctrines formulated in this period were the result of intense thought and searching of the soul in order to interpret correctly the meaning of the Scriptures on the disputed points and to avoid the erroneous opinions (*doxai*) of the philosopher

Finally, it should be said that, the doctrine of the Trinity is the distinctive mark of the Christian religion, setting it apart from all the other religions of the world. Working without the benefit of the revelations made in Scripture, men have, it is true, arrived at some limited truths concerning the nature and Person of God.

The pagan religions, as well as all philosophical speculations, are based on natural religion and can, therefore, rise to no higher conception than that of

the unity of God. In some systems we find monotheism with its belief in only one God. In others we find polytheism with its belief in many separate gods. But none of the pagan religions, or any of the systems of speculative philosophy have ever arrived at a Trinitarian conception of God.

The fact of the matter is that apart from supernatural revelation there is nothing in human consciousness or experience which can give man the slightest clue to the distinctive God of the Christian faith, the triune, incarnate, redeeming, sanctifying God.

Some of the pagan religions have set forth triads of divinities, such as, for instance, the Egyptian triad of Osiris, Isis and Horus, which is somewhat analogous to the human family with father, mother and child; or the Hindu triad of Brahma, Vishnu and Schiva, which in the cycle of pantheistic evolution personifies the creative, preservative and destructive power of nature; or the triad set forth by Plato, of goodness, intellect and will—which are not examples of true and proper tri-personality, not real persons who can be addressed and worshipped, but only personifications of the faculties or attributes of God. None of these systems have anything in common with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity except the notion of “threeness.”

## **Errors To Avoid Concerning The Trinity**

- (1) ***Tri-theism***... This is the teaching that there are three Gods, who are sometimes related, but only in a loose association. Such an approach, abandons the biblical oneness of God and the unity within the Trinity.
- (2) **Sabellianism or Modalism**... Sabellius (A.D. 200), the originator of this viewpoint, spoke of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but he understood all three as no more than three manifestations of one God. This teaching came to be known as Modalism because it views one God who variously manifests Himself in three modes of existence: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- (3) **Arianism**... This doctrine had its roots in Tertullian, who made the Son subordinate to the Father. Origen took this further by teaching that the Son was subordinate to the Father “in respect to essence.” The result

was ultimately Arianism, which denied the deity of Christ. Arius taught that only God was the uncreated One; because Christ was begotten of the Father it meant, the Father created Him. Arius believed there was a time when Christ did not exist. Arius and his teaching were condemned at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325.

- (4) **The Jesus Seminar...** members assume that Jesus "couldn't have said" such things about himself, therefore the disciples must have made these things up.
- (5) **The Latter Day Saints...** seem to be monotheistic until you realize that every good Mormon male aspires to be a god to another planet, and that the founders of Mormonism saw God the Father only as the God of planet Earth, not of the universe, since he was appointed to be the God of the Earth by the council of the gods. This is not actual monotheism but a kind of polytheism.
- (6) **Jehovah's Witnesses...** see Jesus as a divine being, but not in any unique sense as sharing the Father's nature. **John 1:1** should read: "and the Word was God." They translate it: "and the word was a god."
- (7) **Unitarians...** reject the deity of Christ.

## **Evidence of A Triune God**

While there is no explicit statement in the Old Testament affirming the Trinity, we can confidently say that the Old Testament not only allows for the Trinity, but also implies that God is a triune Being in a number of ways:

- (1) The name *Elohim*, translated *God*, is the plural form of *El*. While this is what is called a plural of plenitude pointing to the power and majesty of God, it certainly allows for the New Testament revelation of the Trinity of God.
- (2) There are many instances where God uses the plural pronoun to describe Himself (see **Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isa. 6:8**).
- (3) In the creation account, both God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are seen in the work of creation. It is stated that God created heaven

and earth (**Gen. 1:1**), but that it was the Holy Spirit who moved over the earth to infuse it with life in the sense of protecting and participating in the work of creation (**Gen. 1:2**).

(4) Writing about the Messiah, Isaiah reveals Him to be equal with God, calling Him the “Mighty God” and “Eternal Father” (**Isa. 9:6**).

(5) Several passages reveal a distinction of Persons within the Godhead.

- In [Psalm 110:1](#), David demonstrates there is a distinction of Persons between “LORD,” the one speaking, and the one addressed called by David, “my Lord.” David was indicating the Messiah was no ordinary king, but his own Lord, *Adoni* (my Lord), one who was God Himself. So God the first Person addresses God the second Person. This is precisely Peter’s point when he quotes this Psalm to show the resurrection of the Messiah was anticipated in the Old Testament.
- The Redeemer (who must be divine, [Isa. 7:14; 9:6](#)) is distinguished from the Lord ([Isa. 59:20](#)).
- The Lord is distinguished from the Lord in [Hosea 1:6-7](#). The one speaking here is *Yahweh*, the Lord, yet, note the statement in verse 7, “I will have compassion ... and deliver them by the Lord their God.”
- The Spirit is distinguished from the Lord in a number of passages  
[Isa. 48:16; 59:21; 63:9-10](#)).

6) In the Messianic prophecy of [Isaiah 7:14](#), God made it clear that the One who would be born of the virgin would also be Immanuel, God with us.

(7) Two other passages which imply the Trinity are [Isaiah 48:16](#) and [61:1](#). In [Isaiah 48:16](#) all three Persons are mentioned and yet seen as distinct from each other. See also [Gen. 22:15-16](#).

Peter traces salvation to the same triunal source: ‘destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ’ (**1 Pet. 1:2**). The

apostolic benediction: ‘The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all’ (**2 Cor. 13:14**), not only sums up the apostolic teaching, but interprets the deeper meaning of the Trinity in Christian experience, *the saving grace of the Son giving access to the love of the Father and to the communion of the Spirit*.

What is amazing, however, is that this confession of God as One in Three took place without struggle and without controversy by a people indoctrinated for centuries in the faith of the one God, and that in entering the Christian church they were not conscious of any break with their ancient faith. From the above evidence, it should be clear that the Scripture teaches God is one and three.

## The Godhead

(Excerpts From GotQuestions.com)

The term *Godhead* is found three times in the King James Version: **Acts 17:29; Romans 1:20; and Colossians 2:9**. In each of the three verses, a slightly different Greek word is used, but the definition of each is the same: “deity” or “divine nature.” The word *Godhead* is used to refer to God’s essential nature. We’ll take a look at each of these passages and what they mean.

In **Acts 17**, Paul is speaking on Mars Hill to the philosophers of Athens. As he argues against idolatry, Paul says, “Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device” (**Acts 17:29, KJV**). Here, the word *Godhead* is the translation of the Greek *theion*, a word used by the Greeks to denote “God” in general, with no reference to a particular deity. Paul, speaking to Greeks, used the term in reference to the only true God.

In **Romans 1**, Paul begins to make the case that all humanity stands guilty before God. In verse 20 he says, “The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (KJV). Here, *Godhead* is *theiotés*. Paul’s argument is that all of creation virtually shouts the existence of God; we can “clearly” see God’s eternal power, as well as His “Godhead” in what He has made. “The heavens

declare the glory of God; / the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (**Psalm 19:1**). The natural world makes manifest the divine nature of God.

**Colossians 2:9** is one of the clearest statements of the deity of Christ anywhere in the Bible: “In him [Christ] dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” The word for “Godhead” here is *theotés*. According to this verse, Jesus Christ is God Incarnate. He embodies *all* (“the fullness”) of God (translated “the Deity” in the NIV). This truth aligns perfectly with **Colossians 1:19**, “God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Christ].”

Because the Godhead dwells bodily in Christ, Jesus could rightly claim that He and the Father are “one” (**John 10:30**). Because the fullness of God’s divine essence is present in the Son of God, Jesus could say to Philip, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (**John 14:9**).

In summary, the Godhead is the essence of the Divine Being; the Godhead is the one and only Deity. Jesus, the incarnate Godhead, entered our world and showed us exactly who God is: “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known” (**John 1:18; cf. Hebrews 1:3**).

## Three Analogies

- (1) **The Three-Leaf Clover**... One clover but three distinct inseparable leaves.
- (2) **Time**... is a singular word with a distinct plurality, Past, Present and Future
- (3) **The Triangle**... One triangle with three distinct points.

## A few Symbols of The Trinity



The Bible is clear. There is only one God, yet He exists, and always has existed, as a Trinity of Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit (cf. John 1:1-2). To deny or misunderstand the Trinity is to deny or misunderstand the very nature of God Himself.

**Why is the Trinity so important?** Because the Son of God, who always existed as God and is still God; that same one who created all things, actually humbled Himself and took upon Himself human flesh to be the spotless Lamb of God, the only sacrifice suitable to redeem us from our sins and to satisfy the just penalty required by God Himself.

The Apostle John wrote of this pre-existent one, the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Godhead, saying, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.”

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lights every man that cometh into the world.

“He (Jesus) was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”

“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

**John 1:1-14**

The Word was with God and was God. (V.#1) This explains His pre-existence and His eternal equality. The Word became flesh. (V.#14) This explains His humanity. God became man to live the life we could not live because of sin and to die the death we should have died. He was our substitute, the ultimate sacrifice.

## The Triune God In Salvation

God, The Father, God, The Son and God, The Holy Spirit all participated in the creation of man and His redemption.

**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.” **Let Us...this is the trinity at work.**

**John 6:44...** “No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.” **The Father draws us to Jesus.**

**John 14:6...** Jesus saith unto him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes unto the Father, but by me.” **The Son, (Jesus) is the only way to God. Buddha, Mohamed, Allah and all the others are false and cannot get us there.**

**John 3:5...** Jesus answered, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” **The Holy Spirit gives us a “New Birth” so we can enter His Kingdom.**

## Conclusion

How can we neglect so great a sacrifice? How can we reject such Godly love? How can we ever repay God for this incredible debt? “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” **II Corinthians 5:21**

There is no way to pay God back for all He has done for us. In fact, He doesn't want us to pay Him Back. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: **it is the gift of God**: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. **Ephesians 2:9-10**