

Basic Christianity

Doctrine of the Trinity: God – Father, Son, Holy Spirit

What's wrong with this prayer? "LORD, I thank you for your love and for dying on the cross to save us and for living in our hearts."

In the biblical account, all good gifts come from the Father, in the Son, by the Spirit. This reflects that each person of the Trinity is engaged in every work, but in different ways. Whether in creation, providence, or redemption,

the Father is the source

the Son is the mediator

the Spirit is in the world and in us to bring the work to completion

Some questions to consider:

1. Do you think, pray, and worship in a Trinitarian way?
2. What difference does it make whether or not we think, pray, and worship in a Trinitarian way?
3. Is the doctrine of the Trinity biblical?
4. Is the doctrine of the Trinity essential to Christian faith?

The Trinitarian view of God – One God in essence, and three in persons.

One in essence – "The persons are God in exactly the same way and to exactly the same degree. They are equally omniscient, omnipotent, eternal, loving, just, and holy." (Core Christianity, Michael Horton)

Three in persons – "Each has his own personal attributes that distinguish him from the others. The Father is the unbegotten source of all things, the Son is the only-begotten Son, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. The Father gave his Son, and the Spirit unites us to him." (Core Christianity, Michael Horton)

The Trinitarian view of God is unique among worldviews.

Christianity	One God exists in three persons
Polytheism	Belief in many gods
Pantheism	All is divine
Nontheistic/Atheistic	No God, or God does not exist
Judaism	monotheistic
Islam	monotheistic

How did the doctrine of the Trinity arise?

The unfolding drama of scripture

- First Christians were Jews who believed in the only true God
- They were faced with the unfolding drama of God-made-flesh
- Jesus is God, yet distinguished himself from the Father
- The Spirit's descent at Pentacost
- Jesus taught that the eternally existing Spirit would be sent from heaven
- The Spirit is distinguished from the Father and the Son

Is the doctrine of the Trinity a primary doctrine of Christianity?

- If there is no Trinity, then our redeeming Mediator could not save anyone because He would not be God.
- If there is no Trinity, then the indwelling Spirit could not give us life and indwell us as God's own resurrection-assuring presence.
- If there is no Trinity, then the Son and the Spirit are either different names for the same person, or mere creatures.

What is the biblical evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity?

One God: Deut. 6:4, I Cor. 8:6, I Thess. 1:9, Acts 24:14

Three Persons:

- The Jewish apostles and the early church began to worship Jesus and the Holy Spirit as God.
- In the creation account, the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters (Gen. 1:1-2)
- At different times in Old Testament history, a servant of God such as the "angel of the Lord" is identified as God himself (Gen. 22:11-18; 32:24-30, Exod. 3:2-6).
- Jesus is the Son who existed with the Father before the ages and was made human (Rom. 1:1-5).
- According to John, Jesus is the Son, distinct from the Father, and also identified as God along with the Father (John 1:1-2, 14)
- According to Paul, Jesus is "the image of the invisible God..." (Col. 1:15-17)

- At Jesus' baptism all three members of the Trinity are present: the Father speaks, the Son is baptized, and the Spirit is hovering above Jesus (Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22, John 1:32-34)
- Jesus' Great Commission Commandment is spoken in Trinitarian language. *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you and behold I am with you always, to the end of the age.*" (Matt. 28:19-20)

The Battle to Maintain the Doctrine of the Trinity Throughout History

Ancient heresies about God:

Origen	Subordinationism	The Father is the One; Son and Spirit are less "divine".
Arius	Arianism	Only the Father is God; the Son is created
Sabellius	Modalism	Father, Son, and Spirit are "masks" of one divine person.

Many of the analogies that even Christians use to try and "explain" the Trinity are modalistic. For example:

A shamrock

States of water – steam, liquid, and ice

The blades of a ceiling fan

What Difference Does it Make?

- Confessing "one God in three persons" arises naturally in the New Testament – see Matt. 28:19; John 1:18; 5:23; Rom. 5:5-8; 1 Cor. 6:11; 8:6; 12:4-6; II Cor. 13:13-14; Eph. 4:4-6; II Thes. 2:13; I Tim. 2:5; I Pet. 1:2)
- The apostles and first century church had a Trinitarian experience as they read the Old Testament Law given by the Father on Mount Sinai, written by prophets who were carried along by the Holy Spirit (II Pet. 1:21), encountered the incarnate Son (I John 1:1-4), and experienced the Spirit as He descended at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4)
- The salvation of all believers is a Trinitarian work, for God the Father chose us in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4) to be sanctified by the Spirit (I Cor. 6:11).