



What We Believe

Article 1 of 13: The Tri-une God – Part 2

The Tri-une God

The following is part 2 of an exposition of the first article of our statement of faith, the Tri-une God. In part 1, we explored the existence, nature, character, attributes and names of God. In part 2 we will study the awesome truth of the Tri-unity of God.

The Tri-une God

1. The Tri-une God: We believe in one God, eternally existing in three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who know, love, and glorify one another. This one true and living God is infinitely perfect both in His love and in His holiness. He is the Creator of all things, visible and invisible, and is therefore worthy to receive all glory and adoration. Immortal and eternal, He perfectly and exhaustively knows the end from the beginning, sustains and sovereignly rules over all things, and providentially brings about His eternal good purposes to redeem a people for Himself and restore His fallen creation, to the praise of His glorious grace.

God is One

Theologian R.C Sproul asserts,

“Before we can talk about the Trinity, we have to talk about unity, because the word *Trinity* means ‘tri-unity.’ Behind the concept of unity is the biblical affirmation of monotheism.”

R.C Sproul, What is the Trinity? Page 2

Just as boldly as the Bible declares that God exists, it also declares that God is One! The Unity of the being and essence of God is essential to Monotheism. In Deuteronomy God taught His ancient people the “Shema” (Hebrew - to hear) which was a fundamental creed of ancient Israel.

Moses declared,

“Hear Oh Israel, the LORD your God, the LORD is one.” Deuteronomy 6:4

The LORD declared through Isaiah that He is the only true God,

“I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God . . . I am the LORD, and there is no other.” Isaiah 45:5-6

Also see Jeremiah 10:10; Isaiah 44:6; 1 Timothy 2:5.

There is only one true God!

God is Tri-une

Three of the major religions of the world are monotheistic, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Of these, Christian Monotheism is unique. In Christian Monotheism, God is Tri-une. From the testimony of Scripture we believe that there is one true God who is eternally manifested in three co-equal divine Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Many challenge this great truth because the word Trinity is not found in Scripture. Yet there are various names and labels we have come to use in theology that are not specifically found in the Bible. What is important is that the concept is Scriptural. The word Trinity is not inspired as is Scripture, but the texts that teach this great truth are inspired. Our LORD saw fit in His providence that the doctrine should be named this way.

Sproul writes,

“Another objection that frequently is raised against the doctrine of the Trinity is that the Bible ... never uses the term *Trinity*. ... Sometimes it is said that it is a term imposed on the text of Scripture, and therefore it involves an intrusion into the Hebraic mind of the Scriptures from outside the biblical framework. It is said to represent an invasion of abstract Greek categories into New Testament Christianity. ... as if the Holy Spirit could not use the Greek language as a medium of communicating truth, which we know is not the case, since much of the New Testament was written in the Greek language. ... But the question we must ask is this: Does the concept that is represented by the word *Trinity* appear in the Bible? All that the word *Trinity* does is capture linguistically the scriptural teaching on the unity of God and the tri-personality of God. Seeing these concepts in Scripture, we search for a word that accurately communicates them. We come up with the idea of ‘tri-unity,’ three in oneness, and so we coin this term *Trinity*. ... Theological terms such as *Trinity* have arisen in church history principally because of the church’s commitment to theological precision.”

R.C. Sproul, *What is the Trinity?* Pages 59, 60

This concept may seem illogical to the natural mind, but we must remember that our God is a supernatural being and as such He is not bound by the understanding of natural man. Again, our understanding of God and His nature including His Tri-unity must come from His self-revelation in the Bible, which is our rule of faith. As great a challenge it may be to even begin to understand the concept of a Tri-une God, we can seek to understand it to the extent that He has revealed it in the pages of Scripture.

The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Old Testament

As we look at Scripture, we find that the concept of the Trinity is not explicitly revealed in the Old Testament. Early on however, clues and allusions to a plurality within the one being of God are found beginning with the very first chapter of Genesis and then progressively throughout the Old Testament.

We see an emphasis of the unity of God in Scripture with the use of the Hebrew word for one, “echod” on one hand, Deut. 6:4, along with the use of the plural form of the word God, “Elohim”, found some 2326 times in the Old Testament text. We also see the use of the plural pronouns, “Our” and “Us” describing a plurality of the Persons of God.

“Let Us make man in Our own image. . .” Genesis 1:26

“Behold man has become like one of Us, in knowing good from evil . . .” Genesis 3:22

Also Genesis 11:7, Isaiah 6:8.

Even the word one “echod” noted above, when used of God in the Bible in such passages as Deut. 6:4, speaks of the concept of a “composite unity”. You might say it could be described as a plurality within a unity. We see examples of this usage in passages like Genesis chapter 2:

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.” Genesis 2:24

Two individuals are joined together and become one (echod) flesh.

We see another example of this when the spies had come back from spying out the promised land when they brought back a cluster of grapes with them. Numbers 13:23 says they carried one (echod) cluster of grapes. Multiple grapes on one (echod) cluster.

This is not the same as some attempts to explain the concept of the Trinity using extra-biblical examples such as an egg or clover leaves, the triple point of water, etc. These attempts fall way short and in fact rather than serving as examples of the Tri-unity of God, they actually describe what has come to be known as Modalism and Tri-theism. We will discuss this later. The examples mentioned above are merely meant to emphasize the concept of composite oneness in the usage of the Hebrew word for one, “echod” in relation to the nature of God.

The writers and readers of the Old Testament Scriptures no doubt noted these clues and allusions and wondered at them, but from our perspective it is difficult to say just how much they really understood of the plurality of the Persons of God.

The Doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament

It is in the New Testament where the Tri-une nature of God is revealed more fully, and it is here that the number of divine Persons is revealed as three, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The New Testament refers the Father as God, to the Son as God and to the Holy Spirit as God.

The Father is called God:

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ . . .” Gal. 1:1-4

”For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,”
2 Peter 1:17 Also see Ephesians 1:2; 5:20; Colossians 1:12, 13; 1 Thess. 1:3; 3:13; 2 Thess. 2:16; Hebrews 12:7-9; James 1:12-17.

The Son is called and referred to as God:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:1, 14
Also see Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 1:23; John 20:28; Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:6; 1:8;

Some noteworthy details:

In John 8:58, Jesus claims the actual name of God, YHWH, for Himself, “Before Abraham was, I AM”. “I Am,” is the Greek, “Ego Eimi” which is the equivalent for the Hebrew “YHWH”, the name God revealed Himself with to Moses in Exodus 3:14. The Jews understood what Jesus meant by saying this as they then picked stones to stone Him.

Doubting Thomas seeing Jesus for the first time after the resurrection said, “My Lord, my God.” John 20:28. Jesus is referred to here as Lord. Grudem writes of the Greek word for lord, “kurios”, “it is the same word used to translate the name of God, “YHWH” in the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint. Kurios is used to translate the name of God 6,814 times in the Greek Old Testament.” Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, page 544.

We will examine the Deity of Christ in much fuller detail when we expound upon article 7 of our statement of faith.

The Holy Spirit is called and referred to as God:

“Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit . . . You have not lied to man but to God.” Acts 5:3, 4

“ . . .For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:17 – 18

Also see Psalm 139:7, 8 and 1 Corinthians 2:10, 11

Trinitarian Statements

It is here also in the New Testament that we find various “Trinitarian” statements, in which the Father, Son and Spirit are linked to together demonstrating their equality in being.

Some examples of this are:

“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” Matthew 28:19

“There is one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, . . . one God and Father of us all . . .” Ephesians 4:4-6

“According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood . . .” 1 Peter 1:2

A Little Church History

By the end of the first century, the Church, by then a mixture of Jews and Gentiles, continued to hold strongly to monotheism, that there is only one true God, yet united under the Apostle's teaching also believed in the Deity of Jesus and of the Spirit. That being said, they did not yet use the term Trinity and had not yet articulated a very refined formulation of the doctrine.

As with other doctrines, history demonstrates that the doctrine of the Trinity was refined by necessity in response to attack.

Ken Samples explains the origin of the use of the word Trinity to describe the Tri-une nature of God.

“Since the word ‘Trinity’ doesn’t appear in the Bible, some wonder whether the early church simply invented the doctrine. The term ‘trinity’ comes from the Latin *trinitas*. This term was used by the church father Tertullian (ca. A.D. 160-230) who wrote about “a trinity of one divinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” Ken Samples, [Is the Trinity Biblical?](#)

After the first century, challenges to the doctrine of God and to the Deity of Christ occurred from heretical Gnostic groups who claimed special secret knowledge, from Platonic and Stoic Greek philosophies, and from unbelieving Jewish sources. Adequate evidence exists, however, from the writings of the early church fathers for their belief in the Deity of the Father, Son and Spirit, but it was the church father, Tertullian, approx. 200 AD, who was the first to use the term “Trinitas” in reference to the nature of God as noted above.

Other challenges such as Modalism (also called Sabellianism and Monarchianism), taught that God was only one person who manifested Himself in three different modes, as Father, then Son and then Holy Spirit. This false doctrine has been perpetuated in our times in the “Oneness Pentecostal” or “Jesus Only” Movement.

Arianism also posed a very strong challenge to the Doctrine of the Trinity in the early fourth century. Arius a presbyter (elder/pastor) in Alexandria, Egypt forcefully argued that the Son was not truly eternal and not equal with the Father, but was His first and greatest creation. This false doctrine has been perpetuated in our times among the Unitarians and the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

The Council of Nicea was called in 325 AD to deal with these challenges but dealt particularly with the Deity of Christ. Athanasius, a young man of 20 at the time, was a very able theologian who ultimately became bishop of Alexandria, argued convincingly against Arianism. Arius’ teaching was condemned at Nicea, but he did not stop there and was able to convince many of his doctrine, including many bishops and even the emperor Constantine and his son. Athanasius was repeatedly exiled, but ultimately prevailed against Arianism by the grace of God. The participants of Nicea overwhelmingly approved the Nicene Creed, which insisted the Son was of the “same substance” as the Father. The Arians stubbornly insisted that the Son was only of a “similar substance” as the Father. Their position was condemned as heresy. The Council of Constantinople, 381 AD, reaffirmed the Nicene Creed and finally dealt authoritatively with the full Deity of the Holy Spirit. The Trinity has been considered an essential doctrine since then.

Below is a link to one of the early Christian creeds, preserving the Doctrine of the Trinity:

[The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed – 381 AD](#)

The Trinity – Bringing the Concept Together

Contemporary theologian, James White provides a basic definition of the Doctrine of the Trinity:

“Within the one Being that is God, there exists eternally three coequal and coeternal persons, namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

James White, *The Forgotten Trinity*, page 26

Wayne Grudem summarizes the Doctrine of the Trinity in three equally true statements:

1. God is three persons.
2. Each person is fully God.
3. There is one God.

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, page 231

To bring this all together as clearly as possible, as Christian Trinitarian Monotheists we believe the Bible teaches that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit co-equally and fully share the one being, or essence of God. To state this truth positively:

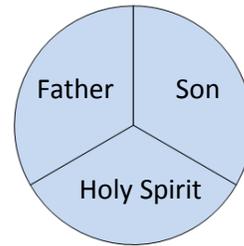
The Father is YHWH God, the Son is YHWH God and the Holy Spirit is YHWH God.

However, in stating this we want to be careful to note that:

The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Father, the Spirit is not the Father or the Son.

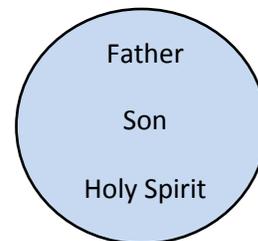
The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not equal parts or divisions of the one true God as if we were to think of the sections of a pie graph.

Not Equal
Parts of or
different
ways to
look at
God



Instead, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit each fully and co-equally share the entire being and essence of the one true God at the same time.

Each Fully
Shares the
Whole
Essence of
God



Again Grudem writes,

“God’s being is not divided into three equal parts belonging to the three members of the Trinity. . . The personal distinctions in the Trinity are not something added onto God’s real being . . . The persons of the Trinity are not just three different ways of look at the one being of God . . . There are three distinct persons, and the being of each person is equal to the whole being of God.” Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, pg, 253 – 255.

Lastly it is essential to realize that - **God is one in essence and three in Person.**

R.C Sproul writes,

“I once had a conversation with a man who had a PhD in philosophy, and he objected to Christianity on the grounds that the doctrine of the Trinity represented a manifest contradiction—the idea that one can also be three—at the heart of the Christian faith. Apparently this professor of philosophy was not familiar with the law of non-contradiction. That law states, “A cannot be A and non-A at the same time and in the same relationship.” When we confess our faith in the Trinity, we affirm that God is one in essence and three in person. Thus, God is one in A and three in B. If we said that He is one in essence and three in essence, that would be a contradiction. If we said He is one in person and three in person, that also would be a contradiction. But as mysterious as the Trinity is, perhaps even above and beyond our capacity to understand it in its fullness, the historic formula is not a contradiction. R.C. Sproul, What is the Trinity? Page 2

Our God is eternal and He does not change in His essential nature.

God is one in essence and three in Person.

He did not become Tri-une. God is eternally Tri-une!

What an awesome truth this is. Our Tri-une God is amazing. Man could never invent this great truth. It is the revelation of God in Scripture!

The Trinity as Ontological as to Being and Economical as to Action or Role

What we have talking about thus far concerning the Tri-une nature of God, is known as the “Ontological Trinity”. Ontology refers to being. So, as we have shown, as to His being and

essence, the one true God is manifest as Father, Son and Spirit and these three Persons of the Trinity are co-equal and co-eternal. The Scriptures also teach us that within the Trinity, there are distinctions in role between the three Persons of God. This has been called the “Economic Trinity”. By economic, we mean role, administration or ordering of activities. We see then that in this sense, the Son can be said to be subject to the Father and the Holy Spirit can be said to be subject to both the Father and the Son.

Grudem writes,

“... the role of the Father in creation and redemption has been to plan and direct and send the Son and Holy Spirit”

Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, pg, 249

He goes on to say, that in Redemption, the Father planned and sent the Son, John 3:16; Galatians 4:4; Ephesian 1:9, 10. The Son accomplished redemption, John 6:38; Hebrews 10:5-7. The Holy Spirit applies redemption to God’s people, John 3:5-8; Romans 8:13; 15:16; 1 Peter 1:2, and empowers us for service, Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 12:7-11.

This is how Jesus could say in regards to His role, that “the Father is greater than I”, John 14:28, without meaning that the Father was better than Him as to nature or essence.

To summarize then, Christian Trinitarian Monotheism teaches in our Scriptural understanding, a unity of the essence of and a Trinity of Persons of the one true God.

The Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity

The Doctrine of the Tri-unity of God is essential to the Christian faith. Misunderstanding or a denial of this great truth seriously impacts at least the following essential and central doctrines: The Doctrine of God – Theology Proper, of Christ, of the Holy Spirit, of Creation, of Revelation, of Salvation including the Gospel and Baptism, and of Worship.

Grudem writes,

“Why was the church so concerned about the Doctrine of the Trinity? Is it really essential to hold to the full deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit? Yes it is, for this teaching has implications for the very heart of the Christian faith.”

Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, pg. 247

Grudem goes on to quote theologian Herman Bavinck as writing,

“Athanasius understood better than any of his contemporaries that Christianity stands or falls with the confession of the Deity of Christ and of the Trinity.” Grudem, pg. 248

Article VI of the Affirmations Statement of the organization Together for the Gospel, states:

“We affirm that the doctrine of the Trinity is a Christian essential, bearing witness to the ontological reality of the one true God in three divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each of the same substance and perfections.” Together for the Gospel, [Affirmations and Denials](#)

Loving the Trinity

James White shares his heart’s passion for this great truth we call the Trinity.

“I love the Trinity. Such a statement strikes many people as strange, rather ‘out of place.’ For many Christians, the Trinity is an abstract principle, a confusing and difficult doctrine that they believe, although they are not really sure *why* in their most honest moments. They know it is important, and they hear people saying it is “definitional” of the Christian faith. Yet the fact of the matter is, outside of singing “Holy, Holy, Holy” in church, little is taught about the relationship of the divine Persons and the Triune nature of God. It is the great forgotten doctrine... It was my desire for my fellow Christians to join me in loving the Trinity, not as an abstract doctrine, but as the very life-giving truth of God. I am *passionate* about the Trinity, because *I love God*, and *I am bound to the revelation of Scripture*. Every Christian needs to understand that statement.”

James White, Internet article, <http://www.equip.org/articles/loving-the-trinity>

In the previous pages we have done an overview of the first article of our statement of faith. In considering The Tri-une God, we have surveyed what the Scriptures have to say about His existence, His nature including His Tri-unity, and we have surveyed His attributes and names.

How should this impact us spiritually?

What should a deeper realization of the truth of the Tri-unity of God do in us spiritually?

1. It should lead us to grow in the grace and knowledge of Him. To know of God in truth and know Him personally is our very life. Jesus said in His high priestly prayer, that eternal life is to know God! John 17:3. We should want to know Him for who He really is and He has revealed Himself in all His Tri-une, Sovereign majesty.
2. To know about our God and to know Him more fully should cause us to be incredibly humbled and incredibly encouraged. If we think of Isaiah in chapter 6, “Holy, Holy, Holy”, “Woe is me ... I am a man of unclean lips”. God’s holiness and purity humble us to realize our sinfulness and wonder, “Who are we” that the LORD should have dealings with us? But the realization that He does have relations with us and that it was He, the Tri-une God, who proactively sought us out should stir in us an eternal gratitude for His redeeming love.
3. Knowing Him for who He really is should give us increasing faith and trust in Him. He is sovereign, He is in control. He has our lives and wellbeing in His hands.
4. Knowing Him more deeply, should inspire us in our worship of Him. Realizing, that worship is all of life and every single day not just on Sunday, we should be stirred to devote our lives to Him day by day as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to Him, which is our spiritual worship. Romans 12:1

These are just a few of the many blessings we can realize by having a better, more Scriptural knowledge of God and a deeper relationship with Him.

**Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty!
God in three persons, blessed Trinity !**

From the Hymn “Holy, Holy, Holy” Reginald Heber, 1826

We hope with this overview, you have been helped in your understanding of the Doctrine of God, and of the truth of His Tri-unity. We hope that through the Scriptural quotes you may be edified in your worship and praise of our LORD. And we hope you will be encouraged to further your knowledge and understanding of the Doctrine of God and the Trinity through some of the suggested references below.

Bibliography:

The Forgotten Trinity – James R. White, Bethany House Publishers (November 1, 1998)

Systematic Theology – Wayne Grudem, Zondervan (1994)

Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know – Wayne Grudem, Zondervan (November 1, 2005)

Systematic Theology – Louis Berkof, Eerdmans (September 1996)

Online resources:

What is the Trinity? - R.C. Sproul, Online PDF Book - Free

<http://s3.amazonaws.com/ligonier-static-media/misc/WhatIsTheTrinity.pdf>

The Trinity – Sam Storms article

<http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article/the-trinity/>

The Forgotten Trinity - James White on Youtube

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ecgkxevoYI>

The Trinity Defended 1 and 2 and Ancient Heresies in the Early Church – James White mp3

[The Trinity Defended - James White](#)

God as Trinity - RW Glenn

[Theology, Part 8: God as Trinity: One True God; God in Three Persons](#)

[Theology, Part 9: God as Trinity: Each Person Fully God](#)

[Theology, Part 10: God as Trinity](#)