

*We believe in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We believe that there is one God. We believe that God is three persons. We believe that all three persons are fully God. The Doctrine of the Trinity is gloriously mysterious, yet not beyond our ability to understand or a contradiction to believe. God was not lonely, bored, or incomplete before He created humanity. God is perfect in Himself, happy in the fellowship and love that exist from all eternity between the Father, Son, and Spirit. Let's worship the true God of the Bible.*

*Leroy Community Chapel Statement of Faith – Article II*

**“We believe that there is only one God, eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Deuteronomy 6:4; 2 Corinthians 13:14). God the Father is the creator of all things (Genesis 1:1) and is sovereign in creation, providence, and redemption (Romans 11:36). Jesus Christ possesses all the divine attributes and is coequal and coeternal with the Father (John 10:30; 14:9). At the incarnation Christ surrendered the free use of those divine attributes, but never surrendered His deity, so that He might accept the characteristics of humanity and become the only God-Man (Philippians 2:5-8; Colossians 2:9). The Holy Spirit is a divine person, eternally possessing all the attributes of personality and deity (1 Corinthians 2:10-13). He executes the will of the Father in relation to mankind. He is the supernatural agent in regeneration, baptizing believers into the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). He indwells, sanctifies, instructs, and empowers the saints for service, sealing them unto the day of final redemption (Romans 8:9; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Ephesians 1:13).”**

*Historic Church Documents*

*The earliest Church councils and their ensuing Creeds and Definitions dealt primarily with the nature of the Godhead (Trinity) and the Divinity of Jesus Christ (Was He actually God?) so I have included those complete Creeds for you. Read slowly, carefully, and don't worry if it feels like your brain is going to explode ... mine hasn't yet.*

- Nicene Creed (325)

“I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets. And I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.” [Complete]

- Definition of Chalcedon (451)

“Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance

with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.." [Complete]

## - Athanasian Creed (400 ish)

"Whoever desires to be saved should above all hold to the catholic (catholic here means "universal Christian faith" not Roman Catholic) faith. Anyone who does not keep it whole and unbroken will doubtless perish eternally. Now this is the catholic faith: That we worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity, neither blending their persons nor dividing their essence. For the person of the Father is a distinct person, the person of the Son is another, and that of the Holy Spirit still another. But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal. What quality the Father has, the Son has, and the Holy Spirit has.

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

The Father is immeasurable, the Son is immeasurable, the Holy Spirit is immeasurable.

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

And yet there are not three eternal beings; there is but one eternal being. So too there are not three uncreated or immeasurable beings; there is but one uncreated and immeasurable being.

Similarly, the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the Holy Spirit is almighty. Yet there are not three almighty beings; there is but one almighty being.

Thus the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God. Yet there are not three gods; there is but one God.

Thus the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord. Yet there are not three lords; there is but one Lord.

Just as Christian truth compels us to confess each person individually as both God and Lord, so catholic religion forbids us to say that there are three gods or lords.

The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten from anyone.

The Son was neither made nor created; he was begotten from the Father alone.

The Holy Spirit was neither made nor created nor begotten; he proceeds from the Father and the Son. Accordingly there is one Father, not three fathers; there is one Son, not three sons; there is one Holy Spirit, not three holy spirits.

Nothing in this trinity is before or after, nothing is greater or smaller; in their entirety the three persons are coeternal and coequal with each other. So in everything, as was said earlier, we must worship their trinity in their unity and their unity in their trinity. **Anyone then who desires to be saved should think thus about the trinity. But it is necessary for eternal salvation that one also believe in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ faithfully.** Now this is the true faith:

That we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, is both God and human, equally.

He is God from the essence of the Father, begotten before time; and he is human from the essence of his mother, born in time; completely God, completely human, with a rational soul and human flesh; equal to the Father as regards divinity, less than the Father as regards humanity. Although he is God and human, yet Christ is not two, but one. He is one, however, not by his divinity being turned into flesh, but by God's taking humanity to himself. He is one, certainly not by the blending of his essence, but by the unity of his person. For just as one human is both rational soul and flesh, so too the one Christ is both God and human. He suffered for our salvation; he descended to hell; he arose from the dead; he ascended to heaven; he is seated at the Father's right hand; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead. At his coming all people will arise bodily and give an accounting of their own deeds. Those who have done good will enter eternal life, and those who have done evil will enter eternal fire. This is the catholic faith: one cannot be saved without believing it firmly and faithfully." [Complete]

### Key Terms & Definitions

*Don't freak out, these terms can be scary, and yet the subject of the Trinity and the Deity of Christ are probably some of the more difficult to explain and argue for, thus terms that have been created to help bring clarity to the subject. Hopefully, I can bring some clarity*

*to the clarifying terms.*

**Ontological Equality** This is the term used to describe the equality of the Father, Son, and Spirit within the Trinity. That means that one is not “more” God or another “less” God. There is no Junior-Varsity God, nor one Supreme Being within the Godhead. A big term, Ontological – “being” and Equality – “equal”, with a fairly simple meaning – Father, Son, and Spirit are equal in being. Without ontological equality, not all persons of the Trinity are fully God, so this is a key term to understand in our knowledge of God.

**Economic Subordination** This is the term used to describe the different roles of the Father, Son, and Spirit within the Trinity. That means that there is distinction in the activity of each member of the Godhead. Another big term, Economic – “activity or role” and Subordination – “distinction”, with a fairly simple meaning – Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct in their roles within the Godhead. Without economic subordination, there is no distinction of the members of the Trinity, and their personhood is compromised in the way they relate to one another. So, this also is a key term to understand, and must be held in tension with the ontological equality of the Trinity.

**Modalism** Modalism is a heretical view of the Godhead that essentially says there is one God who appears in different forms, or modes. It denies the uniqueness or distinctions of persons within the Trinity (the economic subordination part). This error sees the Father in the Old Testament, the Son in the Gospels, and the Spirit in Acts and the early church. It wants to emphasize the “oneness” of the Godhead, but has to deny so many passages in Scripture that speak of and clearly show the relationship between the three distinct members of the Trinity (e.g.: the baptism of Jesus). This is where common illustrations used to teach the Trinity (egg: yolk/white/shell or water: solid/liquid/vapor) can be dangerous as they only really demonstrate the oneness without the clear distinctions of personhood.

**Tritheism** Tritheism is a heretic view of the Godhead that essentially says there are three distinct gods. It denies the oneness and equality of being within the Trinity (the ontological equality part). This error sees three persons, all fully God, yet independent in being from one another. Clearly stated, this heresy denies an orthodox monotheistic view of God (mono – one, theistic – god) and goes the way of pagan belief in a multiplicity of gods. You can see why its necessary to have some clear terms and concepts down so as not to run to one extreme or the other in trying to explain God and then ending up down the road of heresy.

**Arius** Arius is key character number one in the controversy surrounding the Council of Nicea. Arius was the bishop of Alexandria, and taught that the Son was created by God the Father at some point in time, therefore did not eternally exist (nor did the Spirit for that matter). He held that the Son existed before the rest of creation (faulty understanding of “firstborn of all creation”) and yet was not equal to the Father. He described the Son as “like the Father” or even “similar to the Father” but not “of the same substance of the Father”. Big deal? Oh yeah! Heresy? Oh yeah! His denial of the deity of Christ was condemned at the Council of Nicea in 325 and a true understanding of the Trinity and Deity of Christ was articulated in the Nicene Creed that followed that debate. But make

no mistake; Arian heresy is still alive and well today in such forms as Jehovah's Witnesses who teach that Jesus was a mere created being, and not God.

**Athanasius** Athanasius is key character number two in the controversy surrounding the Council of Nicea. Athanasius was at the Council of Nicea as a secretary, but don't let that fool you, as he was already a respected and articulate scholar in the church. He argued against Arius in contending for the full deity of the Son as being of the "same substance of the Father". His Biblical insight won the day and yet he went on to face much opposition, exiles, and an ongoing fight against Arianism (those that held to the heresy of Arius). His contribution to an orthodox understanding of the Trinity and the deity of Christ cannot be understated. He was used of God in bringing clarity to a difficult subject of theology that has been handed down for generations. Viva la Athanasius!

**Council of Nicea** As I have already explained the Athanasius-Arius controversy, you are now an expert on what occurred at the Council of Nicea (325). This is one of those key, pivotal dates in church history that is a fun and colorful narrative. Here the clearest foundational teaching on the Godhead emerges, bringing the nature of the Son and the essence of the Trinity into focus. The Council of Nicea, with its approximately 300 attendees, voted overwhelmingly in favor of Athanasius' articulation of the deity of Christ (all but two – Arius and a buddy, I'm sure). This was also significant in the mere fact that the emperor Constantine had convened this council to resolve a theological dispute, and set the precedent for all future Church Councils.

**Sovereignty** This term is used to describe God's rule over His creation. So, when we say God is sovereign, we are saying that He is free to do what He chooses over what He has created. He is not bound by men, or time, or weakness. I love this word ... I love this concept ... I love that we worship a Sovereign God who works all things according to His will, for our good and His glory!

**Providence** This term, much like sovereignty, describes the activity of God in preserving and governing everything in the universe to accomplish His purposes. He did not create and then disappear, nor did He create and then relinquish control over the universe He created. He is still alive and well, intimately involved in the affair of His Creation. Things do not happen by chance, random effects, nor impersonal "fate." God governs and holds together the big (solar system) and the small (molecules), not "Mother Nature", "Mother Earth", or "Mother Goose." He is not sitting up in heaven "hoping" things work out, "wishing" us to make good choices, or "concerned" that it may not end up in His victory. He is Lord over creation, and Lord of my life, accomplishing all His perfect will, even when we (created beings) don't see how it all fits together or appears to be "good".

**Incarnation** We use this term to describe God the Son taking on human flesh. You may hear the term "God Incarnate" and that means God fully God and fully man ... who was that? The second member of the Godhead – Jesus Christ. We'll talk more about this when we get to our Statement of Faith Article on Jesus Christ, but this is certainly part of the discussion here and clearly stated in the Definition of Chalcedon recorded above.

**Eternal Sonship** Ok, this one gets fairly esoteric (abstract), but is nonetheless a key

component at one level of this theological conversation. Did the second member of the Trinity always exist as the Son, that is the question? Here's what matters: 1 – The Son wasn't created when it was time to be born of a virgin, He always existed (He is eternal). 2 – The Son was always equal to the Father in essence (remember ontological equality) and subordinate to the Father in role (remember economic subordination). 3 – Was He always “the Son” or was that a title given to Him for mankind to understand Him in the Incarnation (taking on of human flesh)? I'm not sure, nor do I think it's a major deal if we firmly hold to the first two statements I made. So there you have it, just in case you ever hear that term in the discussion.

**Only Begotten Son** So many of us memorized John 3:16 in the King James that we have this verbiage in our heads and it can be misleading. When Jesus is talked about as the “begotten one” or the “firstborn of all creation” it is not the idea of being the first created one, or born one, but points to the “uniqueness” of the Son and the “preeminent” place of the Son over all creation. The Greek word translated “begotten” has been shown by many scholars to be more accurately translated as “unique”.

**Hypostatic Union** One final term here that may come up, and it is used to describe the person of Christ as fully God and fully man. The “union” of Christ's divine and human nature into one “being” – hypostasis. Again, we will discuss this further in the Article on the Person of Jesus Christ.

#### Foundational Biblical Data

#### **Genesis 1:26 “Let us make man in our image”**

Before we get out of the first chapter of the first book of the Bible we get a hint of the Trinitarian relationship within the Godhead. As we come to the end of the creation account and the creating of man, we read of God saying, “Let us make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness.” This is the first clue that God (singular) is more than one person (plural) and that there is a relationship within the Godhead. At this point in what has been revealed we don't know much more than that, but suffice it to say, we must not pass to speedily over this key introduction to the person of God in the Old Testament.

One other key Old Testament text is found in Psalm 110, where we read, “The LORD says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” Again, this is another clear reference to the idea of the Godhead as more than one person. This text is used by New Testament writers to describe God the Father saying to God the Son “Sit at my right hand.” Clearly David (who wrote Psalm 110) had an understanding of the plurality of persons in one God. [When you see the word LORD in all capitals in the Bible it is the translators way of indicating the Hebrew name for God YHWH or Yahweh, which was not spoken aloud by the Jews out of reverence. When it is simply ‘Lord’ that designates a title/description, and not His name.]

#### **Deuteronomy 6:4-5; 1 Timothy 2:5 “The LORD our God, the LORD is one”**

A clear teaching in the Old and New Testament is that we worship one God, we do not

believe in multiple Gods. Jews and Christians are monotheistic, this was distinct in the midst of the pagan nations of the Old and New Testament that worshipped and served multiple gods. As we build our understanding of the Trinity, this establishes the truth that there is one God.

### **Matthew 3:16-17 “This is my Son, with whom I am well pleased”**

As the pages of the New Testament open and we are witness to the baptism of Jesus Christ, we observe one of the clearest places in Scripture where the plurality of the Godhead is shown, and now, with clearer articulation in the progress of revelation we see the three members of the Godhead functioning in relationship together. Watch ...

The Son, Jesus, now having taken on human flesh goes down to the Jordan River to be baptized by John the Baptist. We see the incarnate second member of the Trinity being obedient in baptism.

The Spirit is also observed here pictured as a dove descending from heaven and coming to rest upon Jesus. We see the third member of the Trinity in relationship to the Son and in the ministry of the Godhead to mankind.

The Father, likewise, is heard here at this scene declaring from heaven, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Not only do we hear the Father’s voice, but we get a glimpse into the relational dynamic of the Godhead as one of perfect love and perfect unity.

Not only is God one, but there are three persons, all of whom are fully God.

### **1 Peter 1:2 “According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for the obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood”**

We saw in the baptism of Jesus passage a piece of Gospel narrative where the Trinity is pictured, now here is a bit of Petrine (Peter wrote it) literature where we see the Trinity described in relation to the believer. God the Father’s work of electing love in salvation toward the believer, the sanctifying work of the Spirit toward the believer, and the sacrificial cross-work of Jesus in redemption toward the believer. This text clearly shows the unified work of the Godhead in the salvation of sinners, and at the same time the distinct roles each member of the Godhead plays in redemption.

### **John 1:1-2 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”**

This is one of those key passages in understanding the pre-existence of the Son (the Word) before his actual taking on of human flesh, and in understanding the deity of Christ. We know that the Word refers to Christ because this is what John states down in 1:14-18. A number of central truths about the Godhead are learned here:

(1) We learn of the distinction between Father and Son as is states the Word was “with”

God. This preposition “with” would not be used if they were the same person.

(2) We see the eternity (He always existed) of the Son, and therefore that He was not created by God, but existed with God in the beginning.

(3) We learn that the Son was God, distinct in person and yet equally God.

This passage is mistranslated by the Jehovah’s Witnesses where they say, “the Word was a god” attributing a heavenly status to Jesus, but denying the full divinity of the Son. Not only is this an incorrect translation based on the Greek grammar, but they are even inconsistent in how they translate because later in the passage they translate “God” rather than “a god.”

This text is not only beautiful literature, but clear and careful teaching regarding the deity of Jesus Christ, His distinction and equality within the Trinity, and His uncreated eternity.

### **Colossians 1:15-20; 2:9 “For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily”**

These sections in the book of Colossians are the apostle Paul’s clearest teaching on the deity of Christ. Here Paul attributes full deity to the Son by pointing to His preeminence over all creation, His role in creation itself, His existence before creation, His role as sustainer of creation, and His role in reconciling all things to the Father through the work of the cross. WOW! Paul didn’t see Jesus as merely a man created by the Father, but as being one with the Father, of the *same* substance of the Father, and sharing in the glory that is only the Godhead’s to bask in.

Please friends, accept no alternative arguments or conclusions about Jesus Christ, this is what the Bible teaches, the Creeds declare, and the Spirit affirms!

#### *Frequently Asked Questions*

1- Is the Trinity even a Biblical concept? Is the word even in the Bible?

No, the word Trinity isn’t in the Bible. Is the doctrine of the Trinity taught, described, and defended in the Bible? Absolutely. Part of Bible study is the ability to synthesize material and assemble a cogent body of information based on all the parts, we call this systematic theology. In the matter of the Trinity, careful attention must be given to the Triune God as described from Genesis to Revelation so that we do not undermine the very central tenets of the Christian faith. Listen to Bruce Ware, “*The Christian God, to be Savior, must then be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That is, our salvation comes as the Father judges our sin in his Son, who became incarnate and lived his life in the power of the Spirit as the perfect and sinless God-man, and accomplished his perfect obedience to the Father through the power of the Spirit. Disregard the Trinity and you necessarily undermine salvation.*” If we do not contend for the complete Biblical truth regarding the Trinity we will abandon the work of the Gospel.

2- What about analogies like the “egg” or “water” to teach about God?

If you could explain the mysterious Trinity with an egg, we’ve gotta problem. Perhaps

you've heard the illustration about how the Trinity is like an egg, three in one – shell, egg white, and yoke all contained together as one. Or how it's like water – at one time a solid, another time liquid, and yet another vapor, yet all forms of water. Do these help? I don't know, they never really did for me. Do they hurt? Yeah, I think they do in a couple ways. The first being, a general degrading of the glory and mystery of the Godhead with a base and crude illustration ... it just doesn't fit. Secondly, and more importantly, the content of the illustration leads us to the heresy of modalism, namely that they are just different parts (or forms) of the same thing. These illustrations deny the distinctness of each member of the Trinity. I think it's better to just try to be as clear as we can about Bible truths regarding the members of the Godhead than reduce God to our level with illustrations that complicate and confuse the matter. Wayne Grudem offers a thoughtful warning here, *"We should be warned by the errors that have been made in the past. They have all come about through attempts to simplify the doctrine of the Trinity and make it completely understandable, removing all mystery from it. This we can never do."*

3- Isn't it a contradiction to believe in one God in three persons?

No. It's a contradiction to ask you to believe in "one God" and to believe that there is "not one God". It's a contradiction to ask you to believe "God is three persons" and to believe that "God is not three persons". But it is not a contradiction to ask you to believe that there is "one God" and that "God is three persons" ... this is simply a mystery beyond our finite comprehension!

4- Didn't those funny named guys in the early church just make too big of a deal over nothing?

Yeah, maybe they did ... maybe we'd be better off with a God that looks like us, thinks like us, acts like us, and well, pretty much makes life like we want it to be. Oh, wait, that would be hell on earth because creatures aren't very good at being God! Thank Jesus for men like Athanasius. Name your sons after him. And let's pray we contend for the faith with the same kind of fervor, welcoming the same kind of suffering, and live with the same kind of focus that he did. His actions kept the Church then from reducing God down to man's size, and we would do well to follow in his steps. A glorious, mysterious, not-like-us God produces awe, wonder, and worship. An average, understandable, made-in-our-image God produces apathy, boredom, and self-indulgence. I like what Donald W. McCullough says, *"Visit a church on Sunday morning – almost any will do – and you will likely find a congregation comfortably relating to a deity who fits nicely within precise doctrinal positions, or who lends almighty support to social crusades, or who conforms to individual spiritual experiences. But you will not likely find much awe or sense of mystery. The only sweaty palms will be those of the preacher unsure whether the sermon will go over; the only shaking knees will be those of the soloist about to sing the offertory."* God, thank you for men who fought for a great God who sits in the heavens ... and help me to be one today!

*What Do I Do With This?*

## **In My Head**

I hope you commit to being the kind of Christ follower who doesn't get your ideas about God from pop-culture, or for that matter even Christian culture, but from the hard work of mining the Bible for all its worth. I hope you will submit your brain to some momentary, light affliction in reading theological works that may hurt a little. And I pray you will think right thoughts about God, thoughts that are grounded in the Trinitarian nature of our God ... and that sometimes you'll admit you can't figure Him out.

## **In My Heart**

Worship is all the sweeter if it's anchored in truth and not floating in midair. Fill your heart with the grandeur of God as you live life with joy inexpressible and full of glory. Think about the words you sing, work hard at praying words that have meaning, and discipline yourself to listen even when you don't feel entertained. Grow with the kind of maturity that thinks deeper and deeper while worshiping with the simplicity of a child reveling in Daddy.

### *For Further Study*

The Trivialization of God. Donald W. McCullough. NavPress. 1995.

Father, Son, & Holy Spirit. Bruce A. Ware. Crossway. 2005.

Our Awesome God. John MacArthur. Crossway. 1993.

Communion with the Triune God. John Owen. Crossway. 2007.

### *For Family Discipleship*

## **Questions for Discussion**

- (1) What simple, true statements can you make about who God is?
- (2) How is God one and three persons at the same time?
- (3) Why is it important that Jesus is fully God and fully man?

## **Memory Verse**

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” – John 1:1-2*

## **Song**

We believe in God the Father, We believe in Christ the Son,  
We believe in the Holy Spirit, We are the Church and we stand as one.

We believe in the Holy Bible, We believe in the virgin birth,  
We believe in the resurrection, That Christ one day will return to earth.

Holy, Holy, Holy is our God  
Worthy, Worthy, Worthy is our King  
All glory and honor are His to receive,  
To Jesus we sing, because we believe.

We believe in the blood of Jesus, We believe in eternal life,  
We believe in His blood that frees us, To become the bride of Christ.

[Chorus]

### **A Catechism for Young Children**

Q. Are there more gods than one?

A. There is only one God.

Q. In how many persons does this one God exist?

A. In three persons.

Q. What are they?

A. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.