

## The Trinity: One God In Three Persons

Major Reference: A great deal of the outline and content of this presentation have been obtained from Wayne Grudem's book entitled, "Systematic Theology".

Introduction: The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most important in the Christian faith. It has implications for the very heart of our faith. If, for example, Jesus was not both God and man, a mere created being, and not fully God, then he could not have borne the full justice and wrath of God upon himself on our behalf. The atonement would be invalid. Justification by faith alone would be threatened, because only a perfect sacrifice could purchase our redemption. Some believe that every serious heresy with the power to seduce people away from a right relationship with God can be traced back to a distortion around the doctrine of the Trinity. We cannot really know God, unless we have some comprehension of how He is both Three Persons, yet One God. While there is a great deal of truth that we can ascertain through the Word and Spirit, this doctrine is also a mystery. With our finite minds, on this side of heaven, we will not be able to fully understand this complex truth.

I. Biblical & Theological Presuppositions: "Trinity" means "tri-unity" or "three-in-oneness".

1. God is three Persons.
2. Each Person is fully God.
3. There is one God.

II. Old Testament revelation of the Trinity. Even though the word "Trinity" is never found in the Bible, the idea is taught in many places.

- A. Genesis 1:26 – God said, "Let **us** make man in **our** image, after **our** likeness."
- B. Genesis 3:22 – "Behold, the man has become like one of **us**, knowing god and evil."
- C. Genesis 11:7 – "Come, let **us** go down, and there confuse their language."
- D. Isaiah 6:8 – "Whom shall I send, and who will go for **us**?"
- E. Psalm 45:6-7, Hebrews 1:8 refers to one of these Persons called God, as Christ.
- F. Psalm 110:1, one of the most quoted Bible verses. "The Lord says to my Lord."
- G. Isaiah 63:10, 48:16
- H. Angel of the Lord – "Angel" means messenger. This "Angel of the Lord" is sometimes called "God". Gen. 16:13; Ex. 3:2-6, 23:20-22; Num. 22:35-38; Judg. 2:1-2, 6:11-14
- I. Personification of Wisdom – Proverbs 8:22-31

III. The revelation of the Trinity progresses and is more complete in the New Testament.

- A. Matt. 3:16-17 – The Spirit of God descends and the voice of the Father affirms and commissions the Son.
- B. Matt. 28:19 – Baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- C. 1 Cor. 12:4-6 – God is usually referred to as "Father" and the name "Lord" refers to God the Son.
- D. 2 Cor. 13:14
- E. Eph. 4:4-6
- F. 1 Pet. 1:2
- G. Jude 20-21

IV. God is Three Persons. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are three distinct Persons.

- A. God the Word/Christ is **with** God the Father making Him a distinct Person. John 1:1-18
- B. Jesus speaks of his glory as distinct from God the Father. John 17:24

- C. Christ as High Priest and Advocate before God the Father requires that he be distinct. 1 Jn. 2:1; Heb. 7:25
- D. The Father and/or the Son are not the Holy Spirit. Jn. 14:26 The Holy Spirit teaches and intercedes. Ro. 8:27 The Holy Spirit intercedes to the Father.
- E. Son is not the Holy Spirit. Matt.28:19; John 16:7
- F. Holy Spirit is not a force or power...Holy Spirit is a "He" equal to and in coordination with God the Father and Son. Matt.28:19; 1 Cor. 12:4 – 6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Pet. 1:2; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14. Holy Spirit teaches (Jn.14:26), bears witness (Jn. 15:26; Ro. 8:16), intercedes and prays (Ro. 8:26-27), searches the depths of God (1 Co. 2:10), knows the thoughts of God (1 Co. 2:11), willing to distribute some gifts to some and others gifts to others (1 Co. 12:11), forbids certain activities (Acts 16:6-7), speaks (Acts 8:29;13:2), evaluates and approves a wise course of action (Acts 15:28), can be grieved by sin (Eph. 4:30).

V. Each Person is fully God.

A. God the Father is clearly God.

- 1. God created the heaven and earth. Gen. 1
- 2. God the Father is clearly viewed as sovereign Lord over all and where Jesus prays to his Father in heaven.

B. God the Son is fully God.

- 1. The Word was with God and was God. Jn. 1:1-4
- 2. Thomas, "My Lord and my God." Jn. 20:25-29
- 3. Jesus is Son of God and believing in Him results in having life. Jn. 20:30-31
- 4. Jesus is exact representation of God. Heb. 1
- 5. Jesus called God. Titus 2:13; 2 Pet. 1:1; Ro. 9:5; Is. 9:6; Is. 40:3; Matt. 3:3; Col. 2:9
- 6. Jesus refers to himself as God. Jn. 6:35, 8:58

C. God the Holy Spirit is fully God.

- 1. The Holy Spirit is classified on an equal level with the Father and the Son in Trinitarian references. Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Pet. 1:2; Jude 20-21.
- 2. Lying to Holy Spirit is lying to God. Acts 5:3-4
- 3. We are God's temple where God's Spirit lives. 1 Co. 3:16.
- 4. Holy Spirit is omnipresent. Psalm 139:7-8
- 5. Holy Spirit is omniscient. 1 Co. 2:10-11
- 6. Holy Spirit gives new birth. Jn. 3:5-7

VI. There is One God. Even though God is three Persons, He is one in essence. They are one in their essential nature. There are not three Gods. There is only one God. Deut. 6:4-5; 1 Tim. 2:5; Ro. 3:30; 1 Co. 8:6; James 2:19. Definition of essence: identifying nature: the quality or nature of something that identifies it or makes it what it is; most important feature: the most important element or feature of something perfect form: the perfect or idealized form of something, especially when embodied in a person. The intrinsic or indispensable properties that serve to characterize or identify something. The most important ingredient; the crucial element.

- A. Analogies are somewhat helpful, but all of them have shortcomings. There is no analogy in the Scripture for the Trinity. We can see some illustrations in creation of three things also being one.
  - 1. H<sub>2</sub>O (water) = steam, liquid, ice. No quantity of water is ever all three of these at the same time, they have different properties or characteristics, there is no such thing as "one" water.
  - 2. Humans created in God's image: spirit, soul, body.

## VII. The distinctions between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

- A. Each member of the Trinity is fully God, and each Person fully shares in all the attributes of God, yet there are some distinctions in roles and “functions”.
- B. The Persons of the Trinity Have Different Primary Functions in Relating to the World. The term “economy of the Trinity” is used to describe the “ordering of activities” between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It refers to the different ways the three Persons act as they relate to the world and to each other for all eternity.
  - 1. God the Father spoke the creative words to bring the universe into being. But it was God the Son, the eternal Word of God, who carried out these creative decrees. Jn. 1:3; Col.1:16. The Holy Spirit was active by “moving” or “hovering” over the face of the waters (Gen. 1:2).
  - 2. In redemption, God the Father planned redemption and sent His Son into the world (Jn. 3:16; Gal. 4:4; Eph.1:9-10). The Son obeyed the Father and accomplished redemption for us (Jn. 6:38; Heb. 10:5-7). Neither God the Father nor God the Holy Spirit died for our sins.
  - 3. After the ascension, the Holy Spirit was sent by Father and Son to apply redemption to us. Jn. 14:26; Jn. 16:7; Jn. 15:26. The Holy Spirit brings to completion the work that has been planned by the Father and Son.
- C. The Persons of the Trinity Eternally Existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Some have referred to this as with the phrase “ontological equality but economic subordination”. Ontological means “being or essence”. Equal in being but subordinate in role.
- D. The Relationship Between the Three Persons and the Being of God.
  - 1. God is an undivided Being, yet that in this one being there are three Persons. Each Person is fully God, each Person has the whole fullness of God’s being in Himself.
  - 2. Somehow God’s being is so much greater than ours that within his one undivided being there can be an unfolding into interpersonal relationships, so that there can be three distinct persons.
  - 3. The only differences in the Godhead are their roles and the way they relate to each other and creation.
  - 4. Most theological errors and heresies have come about in an attempt to simplify the doctrine of the Trinity, an attempt to remove the mystery from it.

## VIII. Applications

- A. Because God in Himself has both unity and diversity, it is not surprising that unity and diversity are also reflected in the human relationships he has established. Example: marriage. In the relationship between husband and wife, we also see a picture of the relationship between Father and Son. I Co. 11:3 Just as the Father has authority over the Son in the Trinity, so the husband has authority over the wife in marriage. Husband and wife are equal in how God loves and values them. They are equal in their ability to access God. Gen.1:27; Gal.3:28 Yet, there is a mutual subordination of roles. The husband is the head of the wife, but must love her as Christ loved the church. The wife is called to submit to her husband’s headship, helping to compliment and extend the kingdom mandate given to them. Eph. 5:21-33
- B. In the church we have many members, yet one body. The church is a family, led by spiritual “dad’s” and “mom’s” called to accept ongoing responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the members. Apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, pastors, elders, deacons have been given delegated authority to bring divine order and divine life to the family of God, and the “lost” they are called to reach.
- C. The diversity of the universe will ultimate come under one head, for one purpose, God’s glory. Eph. 1:9-10