

# The Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Belief in the Trinity is one of the distinctive characteristics of the historic Christian faith. The doctrine is a central truth of Biblical revelation. A rejection of belief in the one God who manifests himself in three distinct Personalities—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—strikes at the very core of our faith.

The obvious teaching of Scripture (as we shall see in this article in **Bible Helps**) is that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God—yet there is only one God. The word “Trinity” may be defined as follows: In the nature of the one God, there are three distinct Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—each fully God, co-equal and co-eternal. Some doctrines in Scripture cannot be explained adequately by any human being, but they must be accepted by faith simply because God has spoken. We must remember that God is infinitely greater than man, and thus there is much about Him which our searching cannot reveal.

We use and benefit from many things which we cannot completely understand. We cannot understand the radio and television and electricity and computers, and other scientific inventions. We cannot understand how sodium and chlorine (two very deadly poisons) are combined together to make table salt (which is non-poisonous and which is really essential to life). We cannot understand how hydrogen (which is a flammable gas), and oxygen (which supports combustion), can be combined together to make water—and water is used to put out fires! So it is with the concept of the Trinity. However, even though the truth about the Trinity is beyond our reason, it is not contrary to reason. We must not let our inability to understand the truth, cause us to doubt it. The doctrine of the Trinity is not based on superstition nor speculation. It is based upon sound Biblical evidence. The word “trinity” is not found in the Bible, but the truth about the Trinity is scattered all across its pages. The Bible positively teaches that God is a trinity in unity. Let us look now at some of the evidences as found within the pages of God’s revelation.

## 1. Foregleams of the Trinity in the Old Testament

Although the mystery of the Trinity is not fully explained at any one place in the Scriptures, there is a gradual unfolding of the concept as we read through God’s Book. Gleams of the trinitarian truth are evident already on the first pages of the Bible.

The Scripture speaks much about the **oneness** of God. In Deuteronomy 6:4 we read that “The Lord our God is one Lord.” In John 17:3, Jesus addresses God the Father, and calls Him “the only true God.” In 1 Corinthians 8:5-6, we are told that there are many that are called gods, but to us there is but one God. Yet the Old Testament already gives plenty of evidence that God is a **plural** being.

a) There is the use of “Elohim.” The opening sentence of the Bible says, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). The word translated “God” is the plural “Elohim.” The word translated “created” is a singular verb. A plural subject and a singular predicate is an awkward construction. It is like saying (in English), “They is here.” Yet the Bible writer uses the plural subject with a singular verb.

b) There are plural pronouns. Over and over again, the pronouns “us” and “our” are used when God speaks. At the time of creation, “Let us make man in our image” (Genesis 1:26). After the fall of Adam, we read, “Behold, man is become as one of us” (Genesis 3:22). At the call of Isaiah, the question was asked, “Who will go for us?” (Isaiah 6:8). If God is absolutely one, and not a trinity, then He would ask the question, “Who will go for me?”

c) We notice some selected Old Testament passages. In Isaiah 6:3, there is a threefold ascription of praise to God. The text says, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.” There is one “holy” for each Person of the Godhead. Also in Isaiah 61:1, we read a convincing statement about the Trinity. The Bible says, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me.” The pronoun “me” refers to Jesus Christ. Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1 at the time when He read from the Scriptures in His home town of Nazareth, and then He said that the Isaiah passage was fulfilled in Him (Luke 4:18-21). And so Isaiah 61:1 speaks of the Spirit, the Lord God, and Jesus Christ.

d) The fourth hint at the Trinity (in the Old Testament) is related to the meaning of the word “one.” There are two words for “one” in the languages of the Bible. The first word for “one” means “one in an absolute sense.” An example is found in Genesis 2:21, where we read that the Creator “took one of his ribs” and made the woman. There was one (and only one) rib that was taken from Adam’s side. But in Genesis 2:24, another word for “one” is used. This second word for “one” means “one in a collective sense.” Genesis 2:24 says, “and they twain shall be one flesh.” The word “one” is a compound unity; there are two persons in a marriage, yet the two persons are a single unit. It is always the latter (compound unity) word that is used in the Bible when speaking of God as “one” God. Thus God is a compound Being, and yet He is a single unit.

## 2. Unfolding the Trinitarian Truth in the New Testament

The truth about the Trinity is suggested by the writers of the Old Testament, but it is revealed with greater distinctness and emphasis by our Lord Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament. This is consistent with God’s pattern of progress in divine revelation.

a) The accounts of Christ’s birth and His baptism imply the truth of the Trinity. In Luke 1:35-37, already at our Lord’s birth, we have a clear testimony of the association of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Verse 37 says, “with **God** nothing shall be impossible.” Verse 35 says, “that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the **Son of God**.” Verse 35 also says, “the **Holy Ghost** shall come upon thee.” Also in Matthew 3:13-17, at our Lord’s baptism, we are told how the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at the very same moment that the Father’s benediction came from Heaven. And so, at Jesus’ birth and at His baptism, we see the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit working in unity.

b) The baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19-20 (the Great Commission) is another step in the unfolding revelation about God. The Commission is a command to make disciples of all nations, and to baptize “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” The sentence speaks of the threeness of God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and also of the oneness of God (the **name** of each Person of the Godhead). We notice too that each Person of the Trinity is co-equal. It would be the worst form of blasphemy, for example, to say, “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of Paul.” Paul is only a

human being; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each Persons of the Godhead. Each of the three Persons of the Godhead is co-equal.

c) We learn more about the Trinity in the New Testament Epistles. The Epistles are filled with the trinitarian concept of God. Time and time again—God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit—appear as the joint objects of all religious adoration. It will be helpful to look up the following Bible references:

- 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 (Spiritual gifts are administered by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit).
- Ephesians 2:13-18 (Prayer is related to all three Persons of the Holy Trinity).
- 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 (Thanksgiving is expressed for the salvation which is accomplished through the Trinity).
- Titus 3:4-6 (Salvation again is attributed to each Person of the Trinity).
- 2 Corinthians 13:14 (The benediction is given as an ascription of praise to each Person of the Trinity).

Other New Testament writers affirm the Trinity. Notice the words found in Hebrews 2:3-4, Hebrews 6:4-6, 1 Peter 1:2, 1 John 5:4-6, and Revelation 1:4-5.

d) Another evidence for the validity of the Trinity lies in the fact that each Person of the Trinity is called “God.” The Father is God. Romans 1:7 says, “Grace unto you, and peace, from God the Father.” The Son is God. Hebrews 1:8 says, “But unto the Son, he saith, Thy throne O God is forever and ever.” The Holy Spirit is God. Acts 5:3-4 tells how Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit, and then concludes with rebuke, “Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.”

The last chapter of the Bible pictures each Person of the Trinity united in the glorious task of redemption. In Revelation 22:18, we see the Father warning. In Revelation 22:16, we see the Son witnessing. In Revelation 22:17, we see the Spirit wooing. And so, in the New Testament, we have many clear evidences of the reality of the Trinity.

### **3. Mutual Associations Among Persons of the Trinity**

Time and time again in the Bible, the Father and Son and Spirit are said to have the same attributes, to do the same work, and they are assigned the same functions.

It is true that each Person of the Godhead has a distinct task in God’s plan for the human family: God the Father cares for us and loves us with an everlasting love. God the Son redeems us from the penalty of sin by His substitutionary sacrifice. God the Holy Spirit regenerates us and then lives in our bodies. Each Person of the Trinity has a distinct focus of operation, yet each is found to act together in perfect unison with the other Persons of the Godhead.

a) **Some mutual attributes** are ascribed to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Look first at the attribute (characteristic) of **eternity**:

- The Father — “even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (Psalm 90:2).
- The Son — “but thou, Bethlehem Ephratah . . . out of thee shall . . . come forth (one) that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from . . . everlasting” (Micah 5:2).
- The Holy Spirit — “how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God . . .” (Hebrews 9:14).

Using this same approach, one can find other attributes assigned to all three Persons of the Trinity. The following Scriptures are listed in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit order:

- Self existence: Exodus 3:14-15; John 8:58; Genesis 1:2.
- Omniscience: Romans 11:33-34; Matthew 9:4; 1 Corinthians 2:11.
- Omnipresence: Psalm 139:1-10; Matthew 28:20; Psalm 139:7.
- Omnipotence: Psalm 62:11; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Romans 15:19.
- Holiness: Revelation 15:4; Acts 3:14; Ephesians 4:30.
- Goodness: Romans 2:4; Ephesians 5:25; Nehemiah 9:20.

b) **Some mutual works** are accomplished by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In other words, all three Persons of the Trinity are said to be involved in a number of accomplishments. Look first at the promise of presence for ministry:

- The Father — “not that we are sufficient of ourselves . . . but our sufficiency is of God” (2 Corinthians 3:5-6).
- The Son — “and I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me” (1 Timothy 1:12).
- The Holy Spirit — “take heed therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” (Acts 20:28).

Using the same approach, one can find other accomplishments which are attributed to all three Persons of the Trinity. The following Scriptures are listed in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit order.

- Creation: Psalm 102:25; Colossians 1:16; Genesis 1:2.
- Inspiration of the Bible: 2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 1:10-11; 2 Peter 1:21.
- Birth of Christ: Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 10:5; Luke 1:35.
- Salvation of believers: John 1:13; John 1:12; John 3:5-8.

- Death of Christ: Romans 8:32; Ephesians 5:2; Hebrews 9:14.
- Resurrection of Christ: Acts 2:24; John 2:19; 1 Peter 3:18.

c) **Some mutual functions** are explained in the Bible by relating them to all three Persons of the Trinity. For example, we are born of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit:

- The Father — “whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin” (1 John 3:9).
- The Son — “abide in him (Jesus) ... for ye know that everyone that doeth righteousness is born of him” (1 John 2:28-29).
- The Holy Spirit — “except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

Using the same approach, one can find other experiences which are related to the activity of each of the Persons of the Trinity. We are taught by the Father (John 6:45), by the Son (Matthew 7:29), and by the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). We are to know the power of the Father (Ephesians 1:19), of the Son (1 Corinthians 5:4-5), and of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). We are sent by the Father (Romans 10:15), by the Son (John 20:21), and by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:4). We are sanctified by the Father (1 Thessalonians 5:23), by the Son (Hebrews 13:12), and by the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1:2).

d) **Some mutual relationships** exist between the believer and each Person of the Trinity. For example, each Christian is “in” each Person of the Trinity:

- The Father — “whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God” (1 John 4:15-16).
- The Son — “who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).
- The Holy Spirit — “if we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25).

The Scriptures also reveal that each Person of the Trinity “dwells in” the person who is committed to the Gospel of Christ:

- The Father — “one God and Father of all, who is above all . . . and in you all” (Ephesians 4:6).
- The Son — “that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (Ephesians 3:17).
- The Holy Spirit — “know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you . . . and ye are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Surely, in light of all the above attributes, and accomplishments, and close relationships—every true Christian can say, “I am going to appreciate God the Father, and magnify Jesus Christ the Son, and adore God the Holy Spirit.”

It would be impossible (without the tri-unity of God) to understand the great central text of the Bible—John 3:16. It says, “For God (**the Father**) so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son (**Jesus**), that whosoever believeth in him (through the conviction of the **Holy Spirit**), should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Christianity is from beginning to end, a trinitarian faith. If we deny the Trinity, then Jesus is just another man—and like other men from the past—is a sinner in need of salvation. If we deny the Trinity, then the Holy Spirit is just another name for the energy of God. But every true Christian accepts the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity, and sings with enthusiasm the words of the old hymn:

“Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty!  
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;  
Holy, Holy, Holy! Merciful and mighty!  
God in three Persons—Blessed Trinity.”

by Reginald Heber

In this article, we have only touched the surface. We have not thoroughly explained the doctrine. We accept the teaching even though we cannot fully explain it. God is not just one Person, but He is three Persons in one Being.

Augustine was walking along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea one day, absorbed in deep contemplation, when he came across a lad who was digging a trench in the sand. The little fellow was carrying water from the edge of the Sea and was pouring it into the trench which he had dug. Augustine asked the lad what he was intending to do, to which the boy replied that he wanted to empty the Sea into the trench! Augustine said to himself, “Why—I’m trying to do the same thing as this child. I’m trying to put the infinity of God within the limits of my own small mind.” Certainly none of us wants to worship and serve a God who is so small that we can completely comprehend him with our finite minds.

Remember that man himself is a trinity—composed of spirit, soul, and body. Also, every person is attacked by a trinity—the world around us, the flesh within us, and the devil all about us. Furthermore, human sin can be summarized as a trinity—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The greatest truth of all is that every person can be saved for eternity by the heavenly Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Titus 3:4-6 says in essence that the love of God appeared, and saved us because of what Jesus Christ our Savior did, and gave us the joy of having the Holy Spirit then dwell within us.

-Harold S. Martin

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#### **BIBLE HELPS**

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