

“The Forgotten Fundamentals: The Trinity”

Selected Scriptures

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The doctrine of the Trinity is the most distinct feature of Christianity—there is no religion or belief system that holds to anything similar to it; all other religions hold to basal monotheism, pantheism, modalism or polytheism. Only the Bible teaches that the one true God is an eternal, immutable, social Being of three equal Persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Reject the Trinity, and you reject the Bible. Embrace the Trinity, and you embrace the only one, true God of the universe.

Definitions-

Trinity: There is one God who exists as three distinct Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who are coequal and coeternal and share one nature.

Tri-unity: the basis of the word “Trinity”; three within the one—the 3 Persons are united as 1 God

Eternal: never had a beginning; has always existed; will never end; supersedes time

Person: an intelligent, self-conscious, social soul with a will, emotion and immortality

Foundations of the Doctrine of the Trinity-

- 1) There is only one God
- 2) The Father is fully God
- 3) The Son is fully God
- 4) The Holy Spirit is fully God
- 5) The Father is not the Son
- 6) The Father is not the Holy Spirit
- 7) The Son is not the Holy Spirit

Bad Math-

The Trinity does NOT say:

1 (god) + 1 (god) + 1 (god) = 1 God, NOR does it say:

1 (Person) + 1 (Person) + 1 (Person) = 1 Person

Rather, it says:

1 (Person) + 1 (Person) + 1 (Person) = 3 Persons...within the 1 God

OR: $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$ God

OR: 1 What (being/entity), 3 Whos (self-conscious Persons)

OR: 3 Subjects in 1 Object OR 3 “I’s” (persons) in 1 “It” (essence)

Critics-

Those who reject the Trinity usually don’t have a problem with the *biblical* definition of the Trinity but rather they have a problem with 1) their own distorted definition of the Trinity or 2) they have a problem with the deity of Christ

Biblical Ingredients of the Trinity-

I. God is transcendent, eternal, infinite and all-glorious

“*My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,*’ declares the LORD. *As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts*’ ” (Isaiah 55:8-9)

“*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways*” (Romans 11:33)

“*To whom then will you compare God? What image will you compare Him to?* (Isaiah 40:18)

“*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it*” (Psalm 139:6)

“*Without faith it is impossible to please Him*” (Hebrews 11:6)

“*we walk by faith not by sight*” (2 Corinthians 5:7)

“*we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery*” (1 Corinthians 2:7)

“*the wisdom of this world is foolishness*” (1 Corinthians 3:19)

II. There is only one God

A. OT

“*Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one [echod]*” (Deuteronomy 6:4)

“There is no God apart from Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other” (Isaiah 45:21-22)

B. NT

“there is no God but one” (1 Corinthians 8:4)

“there is one God” (Ephesians 4:6)

III. God is a complex (plural) Being

“God [Elohim] said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’ ” (Genesis 1:26)

“Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:22)

“The LORD [YHWH] said...Come, let Us go down, and there confuse their language” (Genesis 11:6-7)

“Thy throne, O God [the Son], is forever...Therefore God [the Father], Thy God, has anointed Thee [the Son]” (Psalm 45:6-7; cf. Hebrews 1:8)

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD [YHWH]” (Isaiah 6:3)

“the Lord said, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ ” (Isaiah 6:8)

“I am He, I am the first, I am also the last...Come near to Me, listen to this:...the Lord GOD [YHWH] has sent Me, and His Spirit” (Isaiah 48:13, 16)

“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him” (John 14:23)

“baptizing them in the Name [singular] of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19)

IV. The Father is God

“God our father” (Ephesians 1:2)

V. Jesus is God

“For a Child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us;...and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God” (Isa 9:6)

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God” (John 1:1)

VI. The Holy Spirit is God

“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in the lower parts of the earth, behold, You are there!” (Ps 139:7-8)

“Now the Lord is the Spirit...the Lord the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:17-18)

VII. The Three Persons are Distinct from Each Other

“There is one Spirit...one Lord...one God and Father” (Ephesians 4:4-6)

“I [Jesus] will ask the Father, and He will give you another [allos, not heteros] Helper, that He may be with you forever, that is the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16-17)

VIII. The Three Persons have Divine Equality

“the Word was with God” (John 1:1)

“Christ Jesus...existed in the form of God...equality with God” (Philippians 2:5-6)

“glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was” (John 17:5)

“the same Spirit...the same Lord...the same God” (1 Cor 12:4-6)

IX. The Three Persons have Different Roles or Functions

A. The Father = “the first Person of the Trinity”; He is the Source, the Sender and the Planner of Salvation (John 14:26, 28; 16:28)

B. The Son = “second Person of the Trinity”; sent by the Father reveals God in the flesh; Savior (Jn 3:16; 1:14; Heb 1:1-3)

C. The Holy Spirit = “third Person of the Trinity”; proceeds from the Father and the Son; glorifies the Son (John 15:26)

X. The Trinity is Relevant to Our Daily Living and Worship

- A. prayer-
- B. baptism-
- C. salvation (the gospel)-
- D. Bible reading-
- E. sanctification-

Trinitarian Heresies through the Ages-

Tritheism-three gods in the Godhead

Modalism (Sabeillianism)-God is one Person who appears at different times in various roles changing modes from one to the other; first He's the Father, then He turns into the Son and later morphs into the Spirit

Arianism- Jesus is a lower level god and created being; **JW's** hold this

Docetism (Gnosticism)-denies Jesus' full humanity (**Islam**)

Nestorianism- Jesus had 2 persons, human and divine

Patripassianism-the Father suffered on the cross in Christ

Subordinationism-says the Son is subordinate in essence to the Father instead of just subordinate in function; **Benny Hinn** has taught variations of this heresy

Adoptionism-the Father adopted Jesus at His baptism

Bitarianism-says only 2 Persons in the Godhead

Oneness Pentecostalism-modern day modalism; God is one Person who was the Father in the OT, Jesus in the NT and the Spirit in the Church age; baptism is in Jesus' name only; **T D Jakes**, of the Potter's House in Dallas, Texas, is the most popular proponent today

Recommended Reading On the Trinity-

Millard Erickson, *Making Sense of the Trinity*

John Feinberg, *No One Like Him*

Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*

Carl Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. V

Gerald O'Collins, *The Tri-Personal God*

Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*

Bruce Ware, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*

B. B. Warfield, *The Works: Biblical Doctrines*

James White, *The Forgotten Trinity*

The Nicean Creed, AD 325-

[The Council of Nicea (in modern day Turkey) was the first Ecumenical Council of the post-Apostolic Church. It was called by Emperor Constantine to address the growing concern regarding the teaching of Arius, an elder from Alexandria, Egypt, who asserted that Jesus was a created being and not eternal. He was opposed by Athanasius, a deacon of Alexandria, and many other elders, who affirmed Jesus' full deity and eternity. About 300 church bishops were in attendance. This document is the by-product of this Council, thus systematizing and affirming the heart of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity]

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 his 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 Ghost 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 sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both 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 proceedeth from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets. And I believe 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.