

# THE TRINITY

## INTRODUCTION

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- *"In no other subject is error more dangerous or inquiry more labored, or discovery of the truth more profitable."* ~ Augustine
- The Trinity of God is a theological doctrine...The word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible, yet the reality is there
- "Trinity" actually is not a good term for the plurality of the Godhead-but there isn't a better one in English
- This term can emphasize the state of being three but without any implication as to the unity of the three
- A proper understanding must include the distinctness and equality of the three persons but also the unity within the Trinity
- A better word would be "Triunity" - the "Triune God"
- Christianity is monotheistic...we believe in one God, not three...the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each fully God...Each exists as a separate person with individual responsibilities within the Godhead
- Truly, herein lies one of the greatest mysteries of all revealed truth.

### *The Trinity Illustrated*

#### *All Are Inadequate!*

Egg - Shell, yoke, white. (Tritheism).  
 Water - Ice, liquid, steam. (Modalism).  
 Person - Husband, father, son. (Modalism)  
 Man - Spirit, soul, body. (Tritheism)  
 Apple - Meat, peel, seed. (Tritheism)  
 Time - Past, present, future. (Modalism)  
 Music - Rythm, harmony, melody. (Tritheism)

## EXPLANATION

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### Definition

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- There is but one essence in the Godhead and this one essence wholly and equally pervades each of the three persons in the Godhead without division or multiplication
- God is three persons in one essence...the divine essence subsists wholly and indivisibly, simultaneously and eternally, in Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- This means that all three Persons of the Godhead possess the summation of the divine attributes but yet the essence of God is undivided
- Economic trinity (different functions) and an ontological trinity (each member possesses the same essence)

### Substantiation

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- There is one true God, but in the unity of the Godhead there are three co-eternal and co-equal persons, the **same in essence** but **distinct in existence-subsistence**
  - Essence-the same fundamental makeup
  - Existence- three persons or subsistences
- The trinity is three persons/subsistences in one essence
- The word "persons" tends to detract from the unity of the Trinity – it is an inadequate term to describe the relationship within the Trinity
- Subsistence is slightly better - not three separate individuals as we would think of as being separate from one another
- *"By person, then, I mean a subsistence in the Divine essence – a subsistence which, while related to the other two is distinguished from them by incommunicable properties."* ~ John Calvin

- The term “persons” is nonetheless helpful inasmuch as it emphasizes not only a manifestation but also an individual personality
- In suggesting God is three with respect to His Persons it is emphasized that (1) each has the same essence as God and (2) each possess the fullness of God.
- In God there are not three individuals alongside of, and separate from, one another, but only personal self-distinctions within the Divine essence...therefore He is not one and yet three, but one in three.
- Not  $1+1+1=3$  (triplex), but  $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$  (triune).
- Conclusion - No matter how hard we try to demonstrate or define the Trinity, it is unexplainable, undemonstrative
- Therefore the doctrine of the Trinity emphasizes the transcendence of God and the inspiration of the Scriptures

## UNITY OF THE TRINITY

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### Definition

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- *“There is but one God and the divine nature is undivided and indivisible. God does not consist of parts nor can He be divided into parts. The unity of God allows for the existence of personal distinctions in the divine nature, while at the same time recognizing that the divine nature is numerically and eternally one”~ Thiessen*
- God is not a composite and He is not susceptible to division

### Testimony of the Old Testament

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*Deuteronomy 4:35~ The Lord He is God: There is none else beside Him.*

*Deuteronomy 6:4~ Hear, OIsrael! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!*

- This means all three Persons possess the summation of the divine attributes but yet the essence of God is undivided
- Oneness in essence also emphasizes that the three Persons of the Trinity do not act independently of one another

*Isaiah 45:5~ I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God besides Me.*

*Isaiah 46:9 ~ Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me*

### Testimony of the New Testament

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*Mark 12:29~ Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘HEAR, OISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD;’”*

*Ephesians 4:6~ One God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.*

*John 10:30~ I and the Father are one.*

*John 14:9~ Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”*

*Romans 8:9-10~ However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.*

## Application

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- God's unity demands that all love and devotion must be for Him alone

## PLURALITY OF THE TRINITY

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### Definition

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- *“There are three eternal distinctions in the one divine essence, known respectively as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Athanasian creed expresses the Trinitarian belief thus: ‘We worship one God in the trinity, and the trinity in unity; we distinguish among the persons but we do not divide the substance.’ It goes on to say, ‘The entire three persons are coeternal and coequal with one another, so that...we worship complete unity in Trinity and Trinity in unity” ~ Thiessen*

### Testimony of the Old Testament

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- The Old Testament does not contain a full revelation of the Trinity, but it does contain several indications of it and does give indications of the plurality of the Godhead.
- While there is no definitive or explicit statement in the Old Testament affirming the Trinity, it is fair to say that the Old Testament allows for the Trinity and implies that God is a triune being in a number of passages.

#### *Plural titles are used*

*Job 35: 10~ But no one says, ‘Where is God(plural) my Maker, Who gives songs in the night,*

*Psalms 149:2~ Let Israel be glad in his Maker(plural); Let the sons of Zion rejoice in their King.*

*Ecclesiastes 12:1~ Remember also your Creator(plural) in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, “I have no delight in them”;*

*Isaiah 54:5~ For your husband is your Maker(plural), Whose name is the LORD of hosts;*

#### *Plural pronouns are used of God*

*Genesis 1:26~ Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”*

*Genesis 3:22~ Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”—*

*Genesis 11:7~ Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.”*

*Isaiah 6:8~ Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I. Send me!”*

#### *Plural verbs are used*

*Genesis 20:13~ and it came about, when God caused(plural) me to wander from my father’s house, that I said to her, ‘This is the kindness which you will show to me: everywhere we go, say of me, “He is my brother.”’”*

*Genesis 35:7~ And he built an altar there, and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed(plural) Himself to him, when he fled from his brother.*

**2 Samuel 7:23**~ And what one nation on the earth is like Your people Israel, whom God went to redeem (plural) for Himself as a people and to make a name for Himself, and to do a great thing for You and awesome things for Your land, before Your people whom You have redeemed for Yourself from Egypt, from nations and their gods?

### **God's name is applied to more than one person in the same context**

**Psalm 45:6** ~ Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of joy above Your fellows.

**Psalm 110:1** ~ The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand, Until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet."

**Hosea 1:7**~ But I will have compassion on the house of Judah and deliver them by the LORD their God, and will not deliver them by bow, sword, battle, horses, or horsemen.

### **The name Jehovah is applied to the angel of Jehovah (Theophany)**

**Genesis 22:11-12** ~ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." And he said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."

**Exodus 3:1-4**~ And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush... When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush...

**Judges 13:17**~ And Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "What is your name, so that when your words come to pass, we may honor you?" But the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?"

### **There are passages that suggest the "threeness" is related to the Godhead**

**Genesis 1:1-2** ~ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.

**Isaiah 48:16**~ Come near to Me, listen to this: From the first I have not spoken in secret, From the time it took place, I was there. And now the Lord GOD has sent Me, and His Spirit."

**Isaiah 61:1** ~ The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners;

**Isaiah 63:7,9,10**~ I shall make mention of the lovingkindnesses of the LORD, the praises of the LORD... 9 In all their affliction He was afflicted, And the angel of His presence saved them... 10 But they rebelled And grieved His Holy Spirit

### **Jehovah is declared to have a Son**

**Psalm 2:7**~ I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee.

**Proverbs 30:4**~ Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son's name? Surely you know!

## **Testimony of the New Testament**

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### **The Father is called God**

**Matthew 11:25**~ At that time Jesus answered and said, "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes.

**John 6:27**~ Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you, for on Him the Father, even God, has set His seal.

## ***The Son is called God***

**Matthew 1:23**~ Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which translated means, “God with us.”

**John 1:1**~ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

**John 20:28** ~ Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

**Romans 9:5**~ whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever.

## ***The Holy Spirit is called God***

**Acts 5:3-4**~ But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit... You have not lied to men, but to God.”

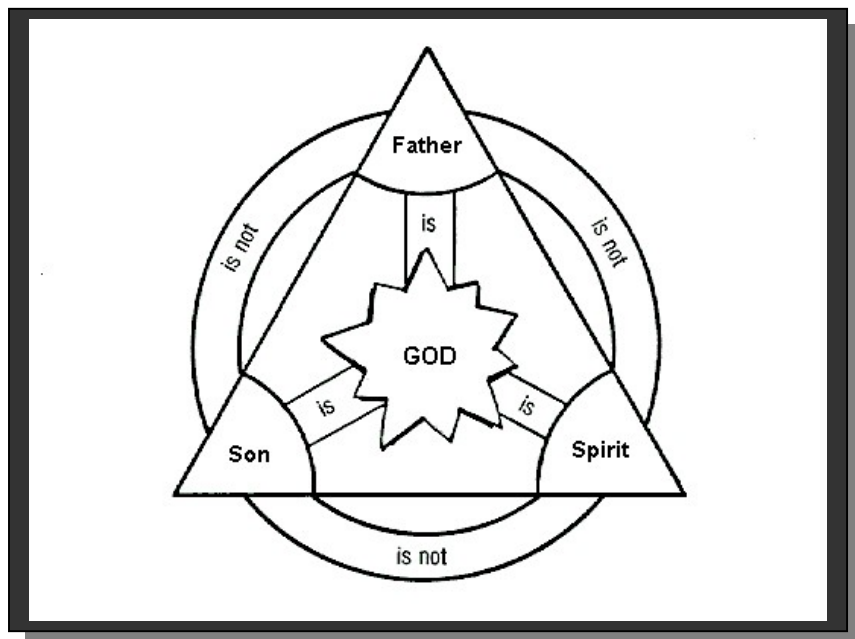
**1 Corinthians 3:16**~ Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

**John 14:16**~ And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;

## ***The Father, Son and Spirit are associated as equals***

**Matthew 28:19**~ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

- Very Important: the word “name” in the Greek is in the singular form, indicating clearly that there is one God, but there are three distinct persons within the Godhead—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- “Jesus does NOT say, (1) “into the names(plural) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” (2) “into the name of the Father, and into the name of the Son, and into the name of the Holy Spirit,” as if we had to deal with three separate Beings. Nor does he say, (3) “into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” (omitting the three recurring articles), as if the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit might be taken as merely three designations of a single person. [What He DOES say is] (4), “into the name[singular] of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” first asserting the three by combining them all within the bounds of the single name, and then throwing into emphasis the distinctness of each by introducing them in turn with the repeated article.” ~ Robert Raymond
- Clearly, we see the scriptures affirm that there is one God, but within the unity of the Godhead, there are three co-equal and co-eternal persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.



*2 Corinthians 13:14~ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.*

*1 Peter 1:2~ 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: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.*

*Jude 20-21~ But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.*

*2 Thessalonians 2:13~ But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.*

### ***The Father, Son and Spirit are distinct personalities existing together.***

*Matthew 3:16-17~ And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him, 17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."*

*John 14:26~ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.*

*John 15:26~ When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me,*

*Ephesians 2:18~ for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.*

*1 Corinthians 12:4-6~ varieties of gifts, same Spirit, ... varieties of ministries, same Lord ... varieties of effects, same God*

## **THE ORDER OF THE TRINITY**

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### **Explanation**

- This does not mean that one is of higher authority than the other: Same essence, but different roles
- The ideas of the "generation" of the Son by the Father and the "procession" of the Spirit from the Father and Son are approximate expressions of the truth
- The Point: The Father, by nature, eternally makes common His divine essence with the Son and the Spirit
- The Son is a form of the essence, not a form or mode of the Father
- The Spirit is a form of the essence, not a form or a mode of the Father
- 3 qualities of the generation of the Son and procession of the Spirit:
  1. It is a necessary act of the Father
  2. It is an eternal act of the Father
  3. It is a spiritual (not physical) act of the Father

### **The Sending Order of the Different Persons**

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#### ***The Father sent the Son***

*John 3:17~ For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him.*

*1 John 4:10 ~ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

## ***The Son sent the Spirit***

*John 15:26~ When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me,*

## ***Sometimes it is said the Father sends the Spirit***

*John 14:16~ And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;*

## ***Interim Summary***

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- This order is never reversed...it is a working, functioning order
- The Father is not begotten nor does He proceed from any person; the Son is eternally begotten from the Father (John 1:18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9)
- The term “generation” suggests the Trinitarian relationship in that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father
- The Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son (John 14:26; 16:7)
- The word “procession” suggests the Trinitarian relationship of the Father and the Son sending the Spirit.
- It is important to note, however, that these terms denote a relationship within the Trinity and do not suggest inferiority in any way

## ***The Resultant Order***

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### ***The Father is the source***

- He begets the Son. He generates the Son. The fact that Christ is the “only begotten” emphasizes the unique relationship of the Father to the Son and that Christ is the only one of his kind

*John 1:18~ No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.*

- He sends the Spirit

*John 15:26~ When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me,*

### ***The Son is the mediator***

- The begotten one...generated from the Father

*John 1:18~ No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.*

- He sends the Spirit

*John 15:26~ When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me,*

### ***The Holy Spirit is the applicator***

- He is the sent one that proceeds from the Father

*John 15:26~ When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me,*

## TRINITARIAN HERESIES

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### Modalism (Sabellianism)

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- Modalism claims that there is one person who appears in three different forms (modes).
  - *Old Testament*: God appeared as “the Father”
  - *Gospels*: God appeared as “the Son”
  - *Post-Pentecost*: God appears as “the Spirit”
- The United Pentecostal Church is modalistic in its doctrinal position...It insists that people should be baptized only in the name of Jesus, not in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- A Response to Modalism: It denies the personal relationships within the Trinity

*John 17:22-24~ And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one; 23 I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me. 24 “Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me; for Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world.*

### Arianism

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- Arius (c. 336) taught that God the Son was created by the Father and thus not fully equal to Him (Arius was condemned at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD)
- This false doctrine relies heavily on texts that refer to the son being “begotten” “first born” (John 1:14;3:16, 1 John 4:9)
- A number of modern cults are Arian in their doctrine (Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses etc.) – they deny the deity of Christ
- A Response to Arianism: When Christ is said to be the “first-born”(prototokos) this means that He has the privileges of authority and rule, the privileges belonging to the first born
- The term *only-begotten (monogenes)* (cf. John 1:14, 18; 3:16; 1 John 4:9) does not suggest a beginning point in time but rather means that Jesus as the only-begotten Son of God is “unique...the only one of its kind...the only example of its category”
- “Only-begotten” is used to mark out Jesus uniquely above all earthly and heavenly beings
  - No one else radiated the glory of the Father (John 1:14)
  - Moreover, the Son “explained” the Father - no one but the unique Son could explain the Father(John 1:18)
  - It was the unique Son whom God sent into the world; eternal life was provided only through the unique Son of God (John 3:16)
- In examining the passages it is evident that *only-begotten* does not suggest a coming into existence, but rather it expresses the *uniqueness* of the person
- Christ was unique as the Son of God, sent by the Father from heaven

### Tritheism

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- This view holds that there are three different Gods found in the three persons of the trinity
- This viewpoint is not held by any modern groups, though many evangelicals unintentionally tend towards this view by emphasizing the distinct personhood of the trinity, but seldom emphasizing the unity of God as one undivided being



## THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TRINITY

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### **The Trinity Demonstrates the Full Implications of Salvation**

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- The Father sent the Son, the Son becomes the mediator and sacrifice.
- The Spirit indwells, seals, and consummates the relationship with God.

### **The Trinity is a Perfect Example of Unity and Roles**

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- Although there is equality within the Trinity, there are significant role differences.

### **Our Walk with God (Maturity, Worship) Depends on Trinity**

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*Ephesians 3:14, 16, 17~ For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father...16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man;17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...*